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# A Phenomenological Investigation of Adult Daughters of Childhood Paternal Abandonment

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Mary Burkhead Spencer

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

A Phenomenological Investigation of  
Adult Daughters of Childhood Paternal Abandonment

by

Mary Burkhead Spencer

MA, Argosy University, 2010

BA, LeTourneau University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Educational Psychology

Walden University

November 2018

## Abstract

A father's abandonment of his minor daughter can leave an indelible impression on her psyche – one that can forever affect her intimate romantic relationships. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. The research questions examined how a daughter being abandoned by her father prior to the age of 18 relates to where she is today in her adult intimate romantic relationships and what meanings participants attach to relationships and relationship satisfaction as a result of their childhood experiences. Theories of social constructionism and psychosocial development grounded the study. After a review of the literature, data were collected through screening questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of 8 women. Each interview was transcribed and the data examined for themes. Key findings indicated that the effect of a daughter being abandoned by her father prior to the age of 18 affects her adult intimate romantic relationships. Results also indicated the psychosocial stage at which she was abandoned affected how she viewed men in her adult relationships as it effects whether she builds trust or mistrust, autonomy or shame and doubt, initiative or guilt, industry or inferiority, identity or role confusion. When the stage is not met, the basic virtue of each stage (hope, will, purpose, competency, fidelity) may be lacking or lost. Positive social change is implicated through this collection of qualitative data that can inform practitioners and researchers, foster therapeutic treatment, and help shed light on and ameliorate the effects of the phenomenon of paternal abandonment of daughters prior to the age of 18.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the eight amazing women who volunteered to participate in this study. They are the epitome of hope and healing – of grace and grit – of tears and laughter. Our visits meant the world to me and hopefully your stories will resonate for years to come.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Walden support system, Dr. Rhonda Bohs, Dr. Medha Talpade, and Dr. Bonnie Nastasi for their support. These three brilliant women have kept me glued together.

I would also like to thank my husband, John for keeping my self-esteem intact when I was struggling to balance home life, family life, work life, and my dissertation. You are my lobster. I would like to thank my mentor, colleague, and friend, Dr. Adam D. Coffey for his insight and calm reassurance that this was doable. I would also like to thank Dorothy and David Burkhead, my mother and father. They were the epitome of great parents. As a little girl my father once told me, “If anyone ever hurts you, they won’t go to prison – I will.” I knew he had my back. He served in United States Navy and he was a hero. My mother was the epitome of a good Godly woman. She fostered my faith and taught me that all things are possible through Jesus Christ. Without Him, I could not have completed this endeavor. He died on the cross that I might have life and have it more abundantly.

A special thanks to James Spencer, Wesley Spencer, Joni Spencer, Nicholas Spencer, Marcy Spencer, Jessie Spencer, Skyler, Sutton, JoJo and Michael. I love you all more than you’ll ever know.

The little red-haired girl who surprised the world when she graduated valedictorian is now Dr. Mary. How cool is that?

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The love of a father can strongly impact the psychological health and well-being of his daughter (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Interpersonal success for daughters growing into adulthood can revolve around parents. Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, and Bremberg (2008) said that father involvement reduced negative psychological issues in daughters. East, Jackson, and O'Brien (2006) emphasized the need for developing strategies to reach fathers and help heal the rift that can be caused to daughters by father abandonment. It has been said, "The reason why daughters love their dad the most is...that there is at least one man in the world who will never hurt her." Physical pain is a social construction until the pain is ours – pain forces the examination of its cause and its meaning (Esposito, 2014).

Over the past few decades, writers have focused on the symptoms of daughters abandoned by their fathers. This focus on symptomatology views father abandonment from the perspective of symptoms suffered by the abandoned daughters (Jensen, Hawkins, & Piercy, 1997; La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Luo, Wang, & Gao, 2012; Quigley, 2003; Haywood, 1995; Hendricks, Cesario, Murdaugh, Gibbons, Servonsky, & Bobadilla, 2005; Comings, Muhleman, Johnson, & MacMurray, 2002). Using these symptoms as a starting point, this qualitative study examined where daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships. Daughters socially construct their worldview through the interchanges and interactions of their childhood. With this information, mental health professionals can work to understand their female clients who

were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and how they constructed their worldview.

In Chapter 1, an overview of the background of the problem and the problem statement are provided to describe the gap in knowledge leading to the purpose for this study and underlying research questions. The theoretical and conceptual framework are provided to guide the theories and research questions of this study. The rationale for the nature of the study is examined along with the definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations, leading to the significance of the study. Within this qualitative study, the researcher will explore the lived experiences of females abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships.

### **Background**

While there are research-based studies on various aspects of father abandonment of daughters, there has been little research based on where adult daughters are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Erickson (1998) said, “A lack of contact with and knowledge of their father leaves children with a gaping hole in their soul, best described as “father hunger.” This father hunger can leave a hole in the daughter’s psyche. Father abandonment can lead to increased suicide in the children of absent fathers, depression, incarceration, school drop-out rates, increased rates of this same pattern happening in the child’s grown-up relationships, behavioral issues, and substance abuse (Thurston, 2015). Father abandonment can also lead to decreased levels of education and lower job security and income (Thurston, 2015).

Weaver (2012) writes about President Bill Clinton starting the President's Fatherhood Initiative in 1994 to address the issue of absent fathers in the United States. The fact that this initiative continues today emphasizes the importance of present fathers for children and society. The effort continues at the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website which is an official U.S. Government Web site managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Brown (2015) explained in his research that children thrive better when they have a present father in all areas – emotional, social, psychological, and physical. Brown (2015) also emphasized that fathers are portrayed all too often in the media as an incompetent, emotionally disconnected, and selfish parent, when they should be portrayed as a competent, present, and financially involved parent who loves and respects the mother of their children. The ubiquitous nature of mass media (television, YouTube, Netflix, etc.) may set the stage for how fatherhood is perceived. Early on programming portrayed fathers as the patriarch of the intact family unit, but as time passed, the father's role became a punchline. Social norms can be heavily influenced by mass media, including the perceived importance of fathers on the well-being of their children.

Gergen (2015), in discussing social construction, wrote that together we socially construct our world. Gergen (2015) said that a relationship with a father gives the capacity to emulate things the father does, as father/child interaction forms a relational history. For years, social constructionist research has tried to discern why individuals interpret events differently: one individual interprets events positively and copes and one individual interprets events negatively and suffers – for which there is no concrete answer (Gergen, 2015). If a daughter's family of origin lacks a father, she may construct her

beliefs regarding relationships in a less-than-healthy way. Jordan (2014) posited that the family of origin is where we learn about love and one of the effects an absent father has on his daughter's love life is that when the daughter grows up, she may seek the attention of males and barter sex for the attention and love she craved from her own father. This is an example of 'father hunger' (Erickson, 1998).

On the subjects of father absence, father deficit, and father hunger, Kruk (2012) addresses the three leading countries that are deemed economically advanced, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Their ranking in the 2007 UNICEF report is extremely low on the scale of emotional and social well-being. While many are quick to cite poverty and race as the possible causes of poor emotional and social well-being (Skevik, 2006; Haywood, 1995), the effect of the absent father on the child's well-being is largely overlooked. The Kruk (2012) article goes on to address the issue of fatherlessness, as possibly the most critical social issue of this day and age.

McLanahan, Tach, and Schneider (2013) said that father absence does indeed have a lasting as well as causal effect on the life outcomes of the child. Father absence decreases the child's level of educational attainment, including non-attainment of a high school diploma. This in turn may lead to unemployment and less earning ability over their life span. McLanahan, Tach, and Schneider (2013) also indicate behavioral issues and substance abuse issues are prevalent in the children of absent fathers.

Erikson's Psychosocial Stages (1963) will be examined in correlation with when the daughters were abandoned by their fathers. Each psychosocial stage correlates with an age range. The stages are 'trust versus mistrust' from birth to 18 months, 'autonomy versus shame and doubt' from 18 months to 3 years, 'initiative versus guilt' from 3 to 5

years of age, ‘industry versus inferiority’ from 5 to 12, and ‘identity versus role confusion’ from 12 to 18 years of age. According to Erikson (1963), there are three psychosocial stages which occur after adulthood and these three stages may be affected by what happens in earlier stages. These three stages are ‘intimacy versus isolation,’ which happens between the ages of 18 to 40 years of age, ‘generativity versus stagnation,’ which happens between 40 and 65 years of age, and ‘ego integrity versus despair,’ which happens at 65 years of age and older. It is a time of reflection and contemplation regarding accomplishments and pride in our life.

Despite the extensive amount of research on the symptomatology of daughters who were abandoned by their fathers (Luo et al., 2012; Quigley, 2003; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Haywood, 1995; La Guardia et al., 2014; Hendricks et al., 2005; Comings et al., 2002) there were no discernable studies on the current adult intimate relationships of these daughters. By examining how adult daughters who were abandoned by their fathers are doing in their current intimate romantic relationships and giving them a voice, the intention of this qualitative study is to fill the gap in the literature regarding where these daughters are today in their current intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships.

### **Problem Statement**

The intent of this supervised research project is to explore females whose fathers abandoned them prior to the age of 18. For purposes of this study, abandonment is an act of omission and neglect. Child neglect has been defined as neglect that is physical, emotional, educational, or health-care related (including medical and dental) and involves lack of supervision and environmental exposure to violence (Centers for Disease Control



and Prevention (CDC), 2015; Leeb, Paulozzi, Melanson, Simon, Arias, 2008). Lacking a father figure makes adult women more susceptible to poor self-esteem (Luo et al., 2012), accidental pregnancy (Quigley, 2003), unfulfilled educational potential (Krohn & Bogan, 2001), poverty (Haywood, 1995), developmental deficits (La Guardia et al., 2014) promiscuity (Hendricks et al., 2005), and divorce (Comings et al., 2002).

Children's difficult social and emotional adjustment and mental health as an adult are two of the strongest implications for absent fathers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), while 5.4% of children in families of married couples live in poverty, almost 30% of fatherless children live in poverty. Drug abuse is significantly higher in fatherless families (Hoffman, 2002). There is a gap in the literature regarding how daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships as evidenced by the literature focusing on the daughters' poor self-esteem (Luo et al., 2012), accidental pregnancy (Quigley, 2003), unfulfilled educational potential (Krohn & Bogan, 2001), poverty (Haywood, 1995), developmental deficits (La Guardia et al., 2014) promiscuity (Hendricks et al., 2005), and divorce (Comings et al., 2002) with little or no literature on where are they now.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Additionally, within the context of these relationships, this study looked at whether there were patterns that lead to women feeling adult relationship success or failure and to what do they attribute this success or failure. Learning their stories and

perspectives facilitates breaking through the wall erected by women's experiences and helping them articulate their stories.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions steering this study were designed to examine and fill the gap in the literature concerning where women, who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18, are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Information was gleaned regarding what meaning they give to romantic relationships and their history of engaging in romantic relationships. How do female individuals that grew up in a single parent household without a father present build their adult relationships?

*RQ1:* How does a daughter being abandoned by her father prior to the age of 18 relate to where she is today in her adult intimate romantic relationships?

*RQ2:* What meanings do participants attach to relationships and relationship satisfaction as a result of their childhood experiences?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

#### **Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism suggests that the development, structure, and functioning of human knowledge and reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann (1966) define reality as independent of our volition such that we cannot wish it away and knowledge as what we know in our reality. Each person subjectively interprets the meaning of their reality. Crotty's (1998) assumptions for social constructionism declare that each person strives to subjectively understand the world where they live and work and play. Social constructionism encourages the

researcher to ask open-ended questions. This allows the researcher to listen carefully to the stories related to them. The researcher seeks to look for broad, complex views including the historical perspective of the world in which people are born – the world bestowed on them by their culture. Researchers generate meaning from the data they collect from participants.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) write that “he who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definition of reality” (p. 127). This illustration of power and control correlates to the relationship of father and daughter in that the father has more power to affect his daughter’s life with reality that is incongruent to her expectations and needs. Durkheim (1995) depicts society as the soil from which our thoughts grow. Daughters may perceive the father/daughter relationship to be socially defined in society and equipped with certain expectations (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Conversely, in the absence of a father to help the daughter socially construct what to expect in her adult healthy intimate romantic relationships, how does the daughter inform her knowledge and reality in a meaningful way?

Social constructionism also posits that each human's life experiences and their interpretation and subsequent assignment of meaning to these experiences are the inspiration for how each person paints the canvas of their life. The effect of a person's life experiences and how they process and decipher them, helps them set the script for their life and how positively or negatively they script their life (Efran, McNamee, Warren, & Raskin, 2014). McNamee (2014) describes social constructionism as our way of negotiating our way in the world. Each person is distinct and different. Each person is the sum of their real, imagined, and virtual relationships and conversations.

Social constructionism holds that each person's point of view is built upon a relativist epistemology, which posits that personal knowledge is relative to personal location within a set of social norms (Cruickshank, 2012; Potter, 2003). The philosophical position of relativism believes each individual's truth is relative to the individual whether it be political beliefs, moral beliefs, religious beliefs, and so forth (Baghranian & Carter, 2015). All this being said, the purpose of this study was to examine and fill the gap in the literature concerning where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships utilizing social constructionism. The need-based reason for this study was to determine how well daughters coped with the abandonment so that behavioral health professionals might be able to mitigate any issues or any destruction left behind. This study will contribute to social change by helping those who were abandoned by their fathers understand the implications and possibilities for creating personal healthy relationships and heal any damage or scars resulting from abandonment.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The researcher looked at a gap in the literature regarding where daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships. Research studies have typically examined abandoned daughters from a symptomatology and deficit point of view (Luo et al., 2012; Quigley, 2003; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Haywood, 1995; La Guardia et al., 2014; Hendricks et al., 2005; Comings et al., 2002). A conceptual framework allows the investigator to connect father abandonment prior to the age of 18 to current romantic adult relationships of daughters. The conceptual framework for this qualitative study consists of social

constructionism and Erikson's psychosocial stages. A transitory introduction to these two theories follows, and a more in-depth dimension will be provided in Chapter 2.

### **Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism asserts that people define their reality through personal experiences and social interactions (Crotty, 1998). People derive and build meaning by their personal view and interpretation of their world. Social constructionism posits that each daughter's identity is created by her personal interpretations of relational interaction (Castelló, 2016; Davies & Harré, 1990). Utilizing social constructionism allowed the researcher to focus on the lived experiences of abandoned daughters from the daughters' own perspectives. Through the lens of social constructionism, a daughter's adulthood is not merely a stage of her development but rather, it is representative of her journey and continual interpretation through her personal narratives (Hammack & Cohler, 2009).

### **Erikson's Psychosocial Stages**

Erikson's Psychosocial Stages (1963) were also examined in correlation with when the daughters were abandoned by their fathers. The psychosocial stages correlate with an age range. The stages are 'trust versus mistrust' from birth to 18 months, 'autonomy versus shame and doubt' from 18 months to 3 years, 'initiative versus guilt' from 3 to 5 years of age, 'industry versus inferiority' from 5 to 12, and 'identity versus role confusion' from 12 to 18 years of age. According to Erikson (1963), these first five stages may affect the last three stages as they may have built the daughter's world view.

In this study, the initial concern is with the first five of Erikson's Psychosocial Stages. In the 'trust versus mistrust' stage (birth to 18 months), the child learns to have trust or confidence in the reliability and sameness of their care providers. The basic

virtue in this stage is hope. When the baby daughter knows she can trust her father, she has hope that she is safe and protected in a world of consistent caring. If the father is absent, she may mistrust male figures and lack attachment to a male figure. Bowlby's attachment theory (1973, 1980, 1982) suggested that even at this young age, the current relationships with others affect later life relationships.

In the 'autonomy versus shame and doubt' stage (18 months to 3 years), a child establishes themselves with ways of experiencing (introspection on their feelings), ways of behavior (as seen by others), and their own unconscious mind. The child is learning to be autonomous but shame and doubt can turn into self-consciousness and the wish to be invisible. In this stage, the balance between self-control and healthy self-esteem is desired. This is the stage where dexterity to play and run develops as well as the choices of what they like (food, clothes). Encouraging children to explore their abilities builds autonomy and allowing them to make their little failures builds self-esteem and self-control. If they are not encouraged in a safe environment, they may feel doubt and shame in their abilities. If the father abandons the daughter in this stage, shame may replace autonomy.

In the 'initiative versus guilt' stage (3 to 5 years of age), a child works toward feelings of direction and purpose and answers the question: Am I good or bad? Being successful in this stage leads to a sense of purpose, while failure at this stage leads to a sense of guilt. It is a stage of play which helps children explore their skills to interact personally with others. They develop the initiative to lead others and make decisions. If initiative is not allowed to bloom, the child may feel a sense of guilt by being restricted. This is also a stage of many questions in an attempt to take the initiative to understand the

world around. If the father abandons the daughter during this stage, she may not develop a sense of purpose that is found by taking initiative and finding guilt when boundaries are crossed.

In the industry versus inferiority stage (5 to 12 years of age), the child learns to be productive. Industry in this case means competence. During this stage, children attend elementary school and learn to read and write, among other skills. Her peer group influences her self-esteem. When the child is encouraged during this time, she builds confidence in achievement. If not, the daughter may have feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. The basic virtue in this stage is competency. If the father abandons the daughter during this stage, she may lack encouragement and reinforcement and fail to build competency and doubt her potential and abilities.

In the identity versus role confusion stage (12 to 18 years of age), the young daughters are primarily concerned with how they appear in the eyes of others and how that compares with how they feel about themselves. This is a time when the young girl is transitioning from childhood to adulthood. A time of life identity and role discovery including sexual and occupational. If the father abandons the daughter during this stage, she may be unsure about who she is and her place in the world. It could lead to an identity crisis. The basic virtue in this stage is fidelity, or the ability to commit to relationships with others and form good friendship bonds.

Erikson (1963) believed that people's personalities develop much the same. Each stage is innate in time and growth. How the daughter handles each stage or whether she was emotionally equipped from a prior stage to handle the next stage, determines the way she perceives herself with respect to the world around her. Examining the stage the

daughter was in at the time of the abandonment allows insight into how each daughter coped. Crises are viewed as turning points in a daughter's life. Depending upon her success in navigating the stages, she may become vulnerable or find strength. Erikson (1963) felt that if the scales are tipped such that the negative significantly outweighs the positive, troublesome issues may hit her harder and affect her longer. The hope is that documenting the psychosocial stage of daughters at the time of abandonment can give clinicians insight into how to help ameliorate the effects.

After performing a review of the literature, semi-structured interview questions were developed. Examining women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships allows the researcher to study where the participants are and how they arrived there. Using social constructionism to determine why and how the participants constructed their beliefs and actions as well as determining what psychosocial stage they were in when they were abandoned by their fathers helps define any underlying similarities or dissimilarities. Accordingly, this study not only focused on why the women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 felt they failed as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships, but also why they succeeded.

### **Nature of the Study**

This qualitative study used the phenomenological research approach strategy whereby the researcher examines the essence of participants' experiences by allowing them to describe the phenomena as they experienced it (Creswell, 2018). Using the theoretical lens of social constructionism, the focus is on exploring where women who



were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships.

The phenomenological approach was selected as it involves the lived experiences of participants as the design of inquiry. Each participant revealed their lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with prepared open-ended questions, as well as plenty of time allotted for participants to tell their personal story. The interviews were digitally recorded to allow the researcher to listen to them multiple times for clarification and analysis. Follow-up telephonic interviews were conducted with the same participants for member checking purposes. This validation strategy communicated the general codes and themes gleaned from the interviews to the participants to ensure that the results were appropriate. Data were analyzed for multiple codes and themes. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed. Each participant's perspective was reported while respecting their anonymity and privacy.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions are frequently used throughout this study:

*Women:* Adult human beings who are born biologically female.

*Ethnicity:* The ethnic group that the participant personally identifies themselves as.

*Social constructionism:* The belief that humans shape their reality through personal experiences and social interactions (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) hypothesized that meaning is not discovered but is instead constructed by a person's view of the world.

*Abandonment:* An act of omission and neglect. Child neglect has been defined as neglect that is physical, emotional, educational, health-care related (including medical and dental), and includes lack of supervision and environmental exposure to violence (CDC, 2015; Leeb et al., 2008).

*Intimate romantic relationship:* An interpersonal relationship that involves romantic emotional and physical intimacy.

### **Assumptions**

In this phenomenological study, the researcher utilized social constructionism which posits that humans create meaning as they engage in the reality that is their personal world. There are five assumptions. The first assumption is that open-ended questions would facilitate participants' ability to share their worldview. The second assumption is that participants made sense of their world based on their social perspective including their culture. The third assumption is that social interaction generated meaning for participants. The fourth assumption is that the data were representative of the experiences of the participants. The fifth assumption is that the researcher in this qualitative study generated meaning from the data collected.

These assumptions are necessary in the context of this study as they are the theoretical foundation of social construction (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Mertens, 2010; Crotty, 1998) and are believed to be fact. These theories explain, predict, and bring understanding to the phenomena being studied.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study is a phenomenological investigation of women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are now as adults in terms of their

intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Only adult women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 were recruited to participate in the study. Although this study recognized minimal risks due to vulnerability of participants, the empirical benefits outweigh the potential risks. This research has important significance for mental health care professionals and other practitioners who wish to treat or study women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and how they develop and engage in these relationships.

### **Delimitations**

Participants in this study defined themselves as born female and still identifying as female. Participants had reached the age of majority. Participants were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18. The sample size was not predetermined but the aim was to interview participants until saturation of themes was reached, which was felt to be between 3 and 10 (Creswell, 2013). Participants had experienced an intimate romantic relationship since turning 18. Those participants answering 'yes' to the Screening Questionnaire question regarding whether they are currently being treated for any mental health issues and indicating active serious mental illness would have been excluded from the study if deemed necessary.

To ensure external validity and transferability, this study was designed to give the reader rich and detailed descriptions to build a solid framework applicable to other settings and situations (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988). Transferability denotes the degree to which the results of a qualitative study can be transferred to other settings. When the researcher has rich abundant details that are interconnected (Stake, 2010), the

reader can find the transferability to other settings as a result of shared characteristics (Erlandson et al., 1993).

### **Limitations**

Due to the small number of participants possible in a qualitative study, the data may be viewed as less empirical thereby limiting the generalizing of findings. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time. Only those who completed the study were given the \$30.00 VISA gift card. The information provided was indirect in that it was filtered through the interviewee's point of view. The advantage to this was that the information provided cannot be directly observed. This study sought to study the interpretations and perceptions from the women's point of view. The interviewee was providing historical information which may be inaccurate. However, the study intended to understand the experiences of the participants and their perceptions, not the accuracy of the experiences. The presence of the researcher might cause bias in the responses of the participants. Researcher established rapport to ensure disclosure, trust, and the comfort of the participants. The advantage of this was that the researcher got to have firsthand interaction with the interviewee. Another limitation was that interviewees might not be equally perceptive and articulate. If necessary, the researcher could use probes to enable articulation. While this might be seen as a limitation, it might also be a strength as it allowed interviewees to use language that is comfortable to them. Member checking allowed there to be an external check of the information gathered in order to help ensure validity. Participants were allowed to contact the researcher if they thought of anything they wanted to add or revise.

### **Significance**

The prevalence of the studies regarding fathers who abandon their daughters seemed to focus around symptomatology (Jensen et al., 1997; La Guardia et al., 2014; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Luo et al., 2012; Quigley, 2003; Haywood, 1995; Hendricks et al., 2005; Comings et al., 2002). To advance knowledge in this area of abandonment this study examined where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships.

Examining what added to positive outcomes in participants to identify potential treatment areas and helping fathers truly understand the long-term repercussions of abandonment to facilitate knowledge could foster father connectedness. Together these foci could link fatherhood and the therapeutic process of therapy to bring about positive social change that is bounded within the scope of this study. By understanding the journey of each participant, it is hoped that mental health professionals can glean knowledge to help those daughters abandoned by their fathers create satisfying intimate romantic relationships for themselves and generations to come.

### **Summary**

The necessity of addressing the effects of father abandonment on daughters has increased over the last decade. Yet, no research was found on where daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Chapter 1 addressed the symptomatology present in research and the need for the examination of where these daughters are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships to better

serve daughters, clients, researchers, and so forth. Questions were formulated and designed to gather information. Social constructionism coupled with Erikson's psychosocial stages were used to examine any correlations. Daughters abandoned by their fathers may have significant issues related to self-esteem, accidental pregnancy/pregnancy, unfulfilled educational potential, poverty, developmental deficits, promiscuity, and unstable relationships and divorce. The participants in this study were willing to articulate feelings of abandonment, the age at which they were abandoned, and where they are in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. By understanding these participants, it is hoped that mental health professionals can garner knowledge to help daughters abandoned by their fathers create satisfying intimate romantic relationships for themselves and generations to come.

Chapter 1 indicated that practitioners have limited qualitative data regarding daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to her turning 18 years of age and where these daughters are today in their adult intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. The data are valuable regarding their potential to inform clinicians and professionals and provide them with needed data to better serve and treat daughters who are abandoned by their fathers. Assembling this data will also provide research that could inform students and produce further research. Research questions were formulated to direct how the data were gathered and processed. An underlying conceptual framework of social constructionism and Erikson's psychosocial stages connected the age of abandonment to the way these daughters' worlds have been socially constructed.

Unspoken assumptions were necessary in the context of this study as they are the theoretical foundation of social construction (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln, et al., 2011; Mertens, 2010; Crotty, 1998) and are believed to be fact. These theories explained, predicted, and brought understanding to the phenomena being studied. Definitions were provided to assist in defining the parameters of the research for the reader. The delimitations also described the researcher's framing of the study. The study's limitations were provided to point out any areas where this study is potentially lacking. This foundation sets the stage for the literature review to elaborate on daughters abandoned by their fathers.

In Chapter 2 of this qualitative study, a literature search strategy is discussed. It was used to search the literature for the most relevant literature for daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to her turning 18 years of age and where these daughters are today in their adult intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. This literature review provided any relevant literature to examine the gap indicated in this study.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this review was to address the most relevant literature for daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to turning 18 years of age and where these daughters are today in their adult intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. This review of the literature provided an analysis and critique of relevant research and examined what research has been done regarding father abandonment of underage daughters. For purposes of this study, abandonment was defined as an act of omission and neglect in which the father forsakes the daughter and her physical, mental, or emotional health, safety, or wellbeing (Findlaw, 2018). Another definition of abandonment is to “cease to support or look after (someone); desert” (Oxford, 2012).

Abandonment can cause neglect in the daughters’ lives and neglect has been defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as being physical, emotional, educational, health-care related, lacking in supervision, and environmental exposure to violence (CDC, 2015). Abandonment intertwines each of these facets for an overall picture of who she becomes as an adult growing up without a father.

The intent of conducting this supervised research project was to explore females whose fathers abandoned them prior to the age of 18 and where they are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Lacking a father figure makes adult women more susceptible to poor self-esteem, accidental pregnancy, unfulfilled educational potential, poverty, developmental deficits, promiscuity, and even divorce. Any or all of these areas affect



her as an adult in her adult intimate romantic relationships and therefore they are mentioned in detail.

Secunda (1992) writes that some adult women who were abandoned by their father experience an inability to trust men and believe that men will not abandon them. Although there is a modest body of writings on fathers who abandoned their daughter, there is a gap in the literature regarding how those abandoned prior to turning 18 years of age are faring in terms of their intimate romantic relationships now as adult females over 18 years of age and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Semi-structured interviews were used to develop an understanding of where adult females are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships after being abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18.

The review also included data on the phenomenon of abandonment. This includes how it is defined and its psychological and physical implications and consequences, including self-esteem, pregnancy, unfulfilled educational potential, poverty, developmental deficits, and promiscuity. To conclude, a summary recapped the literature review's significant elements.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy for this study was a frequentative, continuative search for daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to her turning 18 years of age to discover if there is any literature on where they are now in their adult intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. In the search for scholarly journal articles and books, the following databases were used: Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, Psyc-ARTICLES, ERIC, SocINDEX, and

PsycBOOKS from the EBSCO database at Walden University. The initial search used *daughter AND abandonment* and yielded 47 articles. Searching using *father AND abandonment* yielded 123 articles. Using *child AND abandonment* yielded 920 articles. The issues prominently found included self-esteem, pregnancy, unfulfilled educational potential, poverty, developmental deficits, promiscuity, and unstable relationships and divorce as seen in Figure 1. Additional articles were discovered by reading the reference lists in the initial articles.

Initial searches were for scholarly articles that presented the consequences of childhood abandonment. For example, a longitudinal study incorporated more than 17,000 participants, 54% of which were female (Felitti & Anda, 1997; Newlin, 2011). The study examined the participants' childhood neglect and abandonment, abuse, and dysfunctional family experiences and followed them forward to examine their health and wellbeing as they aged. Of the issues examined in these later life studies of the female participants' lives, depression, promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, and health issues are prominent. However, there was no indications of where these women are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how abandoned daughters develop and engage in these relationships.

This study focused on daughters abandoned by their fathers and explored and described their experiences as they relate to their adult intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. The literature focused on self-esteem, accidental pregnancy/pregnancy, unfulfilled educational potential, poverty, developmental deficits, promiscuity, and unstable relationship and divorce. These are the

most relevant literature topics regarding females whose fathers abandoned them prior to the age of 18 and they will be presented as background for this study.

This literature review was designed to incorporate literature based on exploring the phenomenology and symptomatology of daughters abandoned by their fathers. Literature from academic journals was included in this literature review as well as government statistical data. Additionally, influential established standards, which are the cornerstones of psychology, were also included. Current peer-reviewed literature and empirical studies were incorporated with older reviewed literature and empirical studies for foundational purposes, thereby allowing the building of ideas and research.

Numerous key search terms were used to perform an expansive search for literature relating to the particular phenomenon of the study (see Figure 1). Since little or no literature could be found regarding where women abandoned by their fathers before the age of 18 are in their current intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships was available, issues created by abandonment were explored for study.

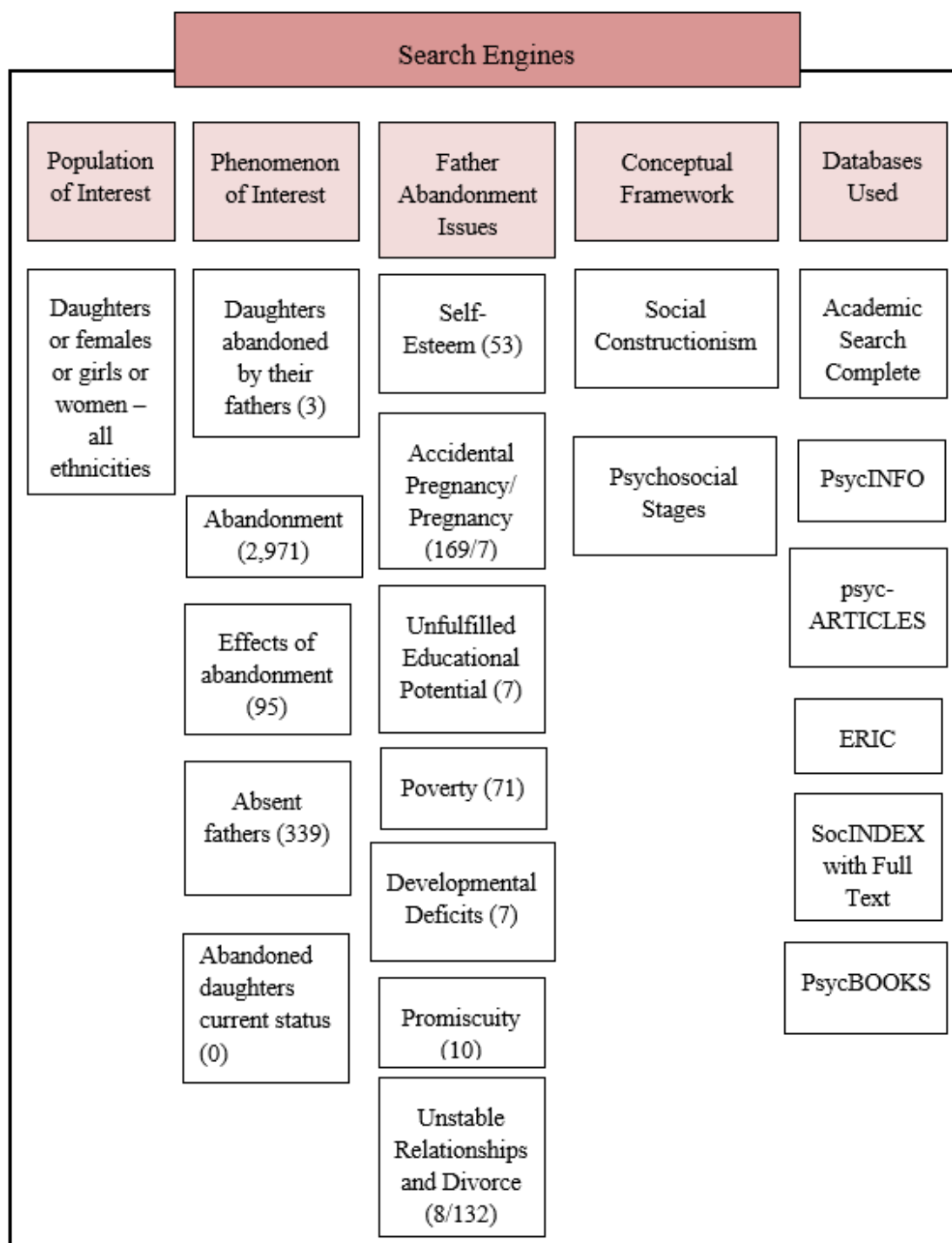


Figure 1. Key terms for academic database search

Additionally, this literature review examined the impact of abandonment on the adult woman's functioning using the above listed EBSCO databases. No specific research studies in the past 5 years were found. One study that came up was a 1990 phenomenological investigation by Persons that revealed that women suffer lifelong consequences when they are abandoned by their fathers. Persons (1990) found several dominant themes among these women. These included a severely damaged sense of self (self-worth, self-esteem, self-concept, and self-confidence), blaming of self for father's abandonment, adult failed relationships, unfocused direction in life, and health problems. Madden and Shaffer (2016) reported that childhood parental relationships affect the experience of romantic love as an adult but did not examine adult daughter current romantic relationships. Madden and Shaffer (2016) utilized Brennan and Shaver's (1995) research on parental attachment-style differences and how they affect adult romantic relationships including non-intimate relationship sexual behavior, alcohol consumption, and eating disorders as well as the dynamics of intimate romantic relationships. Consequently, there was little literature specific to this the impact of abandonment on the adult woman's functioning.

Finally, the terms '*father hunger*' and '*abandoned*' or '*daughters*' were also explored. A 2007 Dissertation (Pogue) entitled, "Where have all the fathers gone? A heuristic study of the lived experience of father hunger" wrote about a son's father hunger with nine themes: "longing and hunger; shame; fear; anger and aggression; grief; difficult relationship with painful emotion; intense reaction to authority; deprivation of guidance; and disconnection from self." There seemed to be no parallel study for women.

Another search result is a 1989 article Drakich explored how fatherhood is being socially constructed instead of empirically constructed but with no mention of adult daughters abandoned by their father. Renner (2011) wrote of an abundance of ‘father hunger.’ He wrote that father hunger leaves a hole in a daughter’s heart and a lasting psychological imprint. It does not address the burning question: Where are daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 today in their adult intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships?

Kevin Renner references the book *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters* (2007) by Dr. Meg Meeker. In her book, she writes:

You will be the most important man in her life forever. When she is 25, she will mentally size her boyfriend or husband up against you. When she is 35, the number of children she has will be affected by her life with you. The clothes she wears reflect something about you. Even when she is 75, how she faces her future will depend on some distant memory of time you spent together. Be it good or painful, the hours and years you spend with her – or don’t spend with her – change who she is.

### **Thematic Structure of Literature Review**

In examining the abandonment of daughters prior to the age of 18 by their fathers, several prominent themes emerged (see Figure 2). Absent fathers can affect their daughter’s self-esteem and the severity is thought to vary according to the age of the daughter when the father left. Anxiety may also be an issue for a daughter. Emotional endangerment is found to be greater if the father left when the daughter was seven to 12 years of age. Effect on the daughter’s development in the absence of the father can be

long-term and impactful. For fathers in some countries such as China this absence is not a matter of abandonment but a matter of earning a living in order to support their families (Luo et al., 2012). Fathers may be taught by society to feel less pressure to be present and attend to the duties of parenting than mothers, feeling that meeting financial duties are their main purpose as a father (La Guardia et al., 2014). Mothers may have less influence than fathers on the daughter's ability to trust and connect well to the males in her life. In correlation with age, there is also a psychosocial stage (Erikson, 1963). Daughters with present fathers tend to have greater self-confidence, greater success in obtaining their education and resulting careers, and greater self-reliance (Nielsen, 2007).

#### Thematic Structure

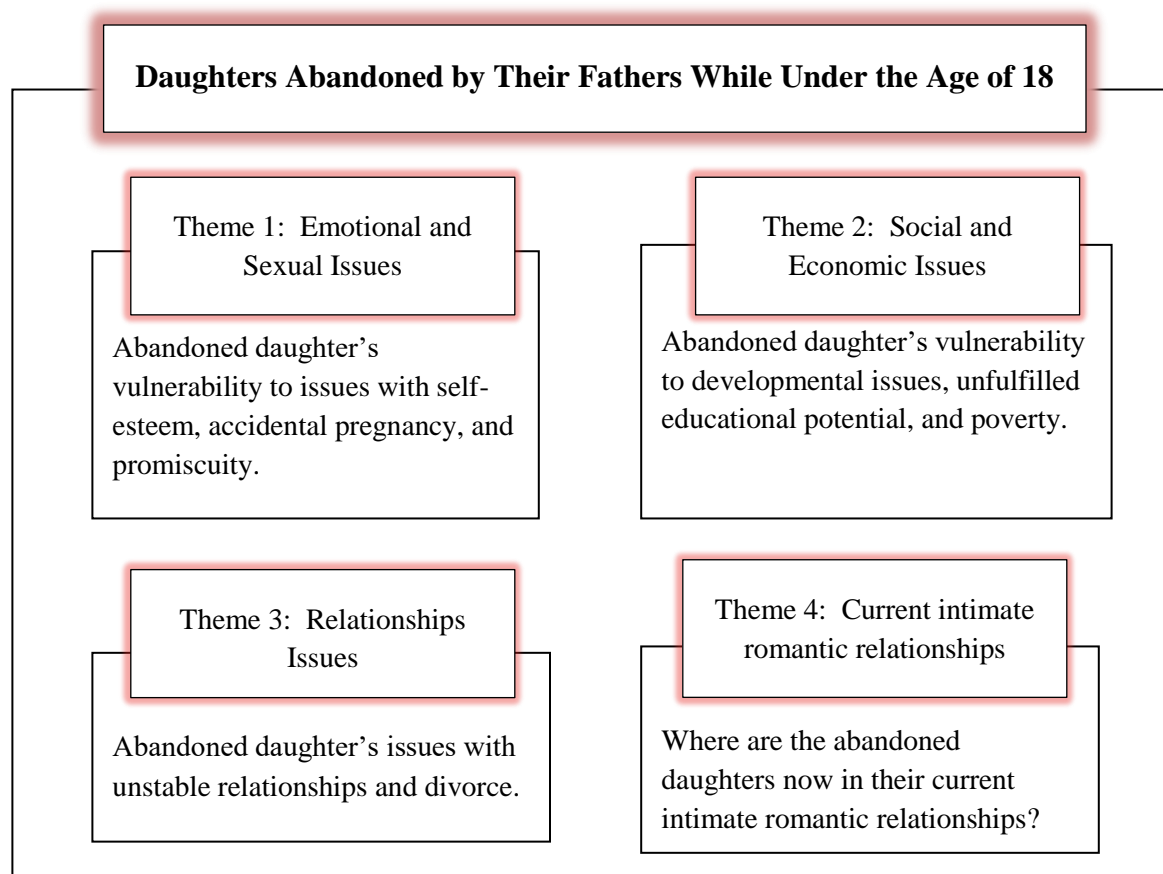


Figure 2. Thematic structure of literature review

## **Theoretical Foundations**

### **Social Constructionism**

The perspective of social constructionism centers on an individual's role in the social construction of her/his personal reality. Social constructionism does not deny the influence of genetics in each person's life, but it believes that each person's world view is determined by her/his communal and individual cultural and societal relationships (Galbin, 2014). All this being noted, there seems to be little data on where women who were abandoned by their fathers before the age of 18 are now today in their romantic intimate relationships or how they develop and engage in these relationships.

Anthropologists refer to the phenomenon as culture while social constructionists refer to it as societal (Galbin, 2014). Daughters socially construct their worldview through the interchanges and interactions of their childhood. A person brings into a relationship what her/his world did or did not include and the view, meaning, and attitude they construct out of such interactions (Soukup, 2012). Galbin (2014) advises that social constructionism suggests that there is no one universal nature of humans. Social constructionism acknowledges each person's socialization, enculturation, and those we have known and currently know shape our personal human nature and view of the world.

### **Erikson's Psychosocial Stages**

A question regarding the age at which the daughter was abandoned was included in the screening questionnaire in order to explore where she was at when her father abandoned her. Each stage of the female journey through life and how her environment affected her plays into who she is as a human being, including her intimate romantic relationships. Erikson (1963) wrote about the psychosocial stages individuals experience



as they transition from birth through adulthood. While the perception may be that Erikson's psychosocial stages are quite dated, they are the established standard.

The stages begin with 'trust versus mistrust,' which indicates life experiences from infancy to around a year and a half of age. The infant becomes understanding of the continuity of her new life. The caregiver is instrumental in wellness at this stage. The basic virtue in this stage is hope. When the baby daughter knows she can trust her father, she has hope that she is safe and protected in a world of consistent caring. If the father is absent, she may mistrust male figures and lack attachment to a male figure. Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982) posited that even at this young age the current relationships with others affect later life relationships. She is also missing out on subsequent stages. The earlier the abandonment occurs; the more elements of psychosocial growth may be affected.

The second stage is 'autonomy versus shame and doubt' and it occurs from a year and a half to three years of age. Children at this age are learning to hold on as well as to let go. The child knows where to hold on for her needs to be met while also wanting to let go and become more autonomous. The right balance at this stage helps develop independence, good self-esteem, and diminishes shame and self-doubt. The basic virtue in this state is will. This is the stage when the dexterity to play and run develops as well as choices of what she likes (food, clothes). Encouraging the child to explore her abilities builds autonomy and allowing her to make her little failures builds self-esteem and self-control. If the child is not encouraged in a safe environment, they may feel doubt and shame in their abilities. If the father abandons the daughter in this stage, shame may replace autonomy. She is also missing out on stage three (ages 3 to 5) initiative versus

guilt, stage four (ages 5 to 12) the industry versus inferiority stage, and five (age 12 to 18) ego identity versus role confusion.

The third stage conceptualizes 'initiative versus guilt' for children from around three to five years of age. Children at this stage are becoming more themselves in judgment and ingenuity. Creative play and self-protection against those encroaching on perceived territory develop. Self-regulation, regulation from others, and knowing when one has gone too far strives to create the balance between initiative and guilt, leaving the child deciding between abrogation and subjugation. The basic virtue in this stage is purpose. It is a stage of play which helps children explore their skills to interact personally with others. They develop the initiative to lead others and makes decisions. If the initiative is not allowed to bloom, the child may feel a sense of guilt by being restricted. This is also a stage of many questions in an attempt to take the initiative to understand the world around. If the father abandons the daughter during this stage, she may not develop a sense of purpose that is found during taking initiative and finding guilt when boundaries are crossed.

The fourth stage of 'industry versus inferiority' paints the picture for those ages five to 12 years. Industry in this case means competence. During this stage the daughter is attending elementary school. During this stage she learns to be industrious – to read, write, and do the work of her age. Her peer group influences her self-esteem. When the child is encouraged during this time, she builds confidence in achievement. If not, the daughter may have feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. This stage might be called competence versus incompetence. Inability to do these things can lead to feelings of inferiority and cause the child to regress to an earlier stage. The school-age child may let

others threaten the sense of identity trying to be established. The daughter may have feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. The basic virtue in this stage is competency. If the father abandons the daughter during this stage, she may lack encouragement and reinforcement and fail to build competency and doubt her potential and abilities.

The fifth stage of ‘identity versus role confusion’ characterizes the ages of 12 to 18 years of age. It is a time when the child is transitioning from childhood to adulthood. A time of life identity and role discovery including sexual and occupational. If the father abandons the daughter during this stage, she may be unsure about who she is and her place in the world. It could lead to an identity crisis. The basic virtue in this stage is fidelity – the ability to commit to relationships with others and form good friendship bonds. Social constructionism posits that a fracture here can change how the daughter socially constructs her world after being abandoned (Galbin, 2014).

Twelve years of age is thought to be approaching the onset of puberty and is usually assigned the designation of being a youth rather than a child. Eighteen is generally considered the entry level of adulthood. Many times, during this stage, the focus becomes what others think of them as opposed to what they think of themselves. This is a time when lasting ideals and role models for self-identity may be solidified. Females are at risk at this stage regarding sexual identity and may over identify with cultural icons to the apparent total loss of their own identity as one transitioning to womanhood. Subsequently, she may seek to fall in love – to find who she is by seeing herself reflected back from her ‘love’s’ point of view of her. This state of limbo between childhood and adulthood is a time of confusion, even between the morals the child has been taught and the ethics that they are developing to guide them into adulthood.

Another crisis of this stage is in trying to find the answer to “what and who do I want to be when I grow up?” and may result in role confusion (Erikson, 1956). Abandonment by a father at any of these stages can result in trauma to the daughter’s emotional, social, and psychological well-being.

The sixth stage of Erikson’s (1998) psychosocial stages, ‘intimacy versus isolation,’ happens between the ages of 18 to 40 years of age. This is a time when females begin to desire to share their lives more intimately with someone else. Many desire long-term commitments in romantic intimate relationships. Erikson denoted that isolation is a concern in this stage. Could abandonment by a father cause an adult female to choose isolation over intimacy? If so, is there a particular stage of the first five stages of Erikson’s psychosocial stages where the father abandoning the daughter leads to her making this choice? Social constructionism incorporates social processes with being a co-creator of one’s world view with one’s cultural responsibility to oneself (Gergen, 1997).

Erikson’s seventh stage is ‘generativity versus stagnation,’ which happens between 40 and 65 years of age. It is a time when having generated a productive life we feel is worth living helps us not feel stagnant and unproductive. Erikson’s eighth and final stage is ‘ego integrity versus despair,’ and it happens at 65 years of age and older. It is a time of reflection and contemplation regarding accomplishments and pride in our life. If a woman feels she has wasted her life and time is almost up, she may feel despair and hopelessness.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **The Phenomenon of Abandonment**

According to the United States Census Bureau (2011) findings, one out of every three children in America live without a biological father present in the home. Daughters raised with fathers do better monetarily (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), emotionally (Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, and Whitman, 2006), and academically (Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, and Whitman, 2006) than their non-father counterparts. The issue of absent fathers has been such that the Executive Branch of the United States government has gotten involved. The President's Fatherhood Initiative started with President Bill Clinton and has continued with George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and under President Trump as the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, an official U.S. Government Web site managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For many years, the Presidents of the United States have worked to bring emphasis to the need for fathers to up their game in their paternal roles of being present and raising children in the United States (Weaver, 2012). Scholarly articles have accordingly, as discussed in the President's Fatherhood Initiative and Mentoring Initiative, focused on the fact there is a 'father factor' in most social issues needing to be addressed in the world today. The DadTalk Blog (2018) is part of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse which is an official U.S. government Web site managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

According to the Center for Research on Child Wellbeing at Princeton University and their *Fragile Families Research Brief No. 46* (2010), father absence correlates with an increased risk of daughter maltreatment. A daughter may be vulnerable to abuse from step- or half-siblings and even social fathers. But hope lies in finding out where abandoned daughters are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and

addressing issues that correlate to this abandonment in order to bring understanding, therapeutic treatment options, and facilitate positive social change.

### **What Constitutes Child Abandonment**

Ask the average person on the street what ‘child abandonment’ means, and the answers will span quite a spectrum. Some would say that the child was left on the doorstep of a church or fire station because the parent did not want her/him but did not want her/him to be hurt. Others would say that it is when a child is left in a dumpster with no thought to her/his safety. If asked what it means when a father abandons his daughter, responses include that dad left her behind in a bad situation, he left her with no further contact, he ceased providing financial support and ceased communication/involvement in her life. Findlaw.com (2018) defined child abandonment in much the same way. While child abandonment does constitute leaving a child in a dumpster, it also includes only minimally trying to communicate and support the child, and not maintaining regular visitation for a period of greater than six months. While Findlaw does not list the states, Findlaw.com (2018) wrote that in some states child abandonment is part of the child-abuse laws. In some states, child abandonment is a felony, while in other states, it is a misdemeanor. In the criminal context, abandonment of a child is an act of physicality, nevertheless, it may also include emotional abandonment, such as being unwilling to bestow care and provide supervision for the child.

This literature review constituted a study of the current body of literature on father abandonment of their children, and more specifically, their daughters, and the different longitudinal stages of their lives culminating in a study of where daughters

abandoned by their fathers are in their romantic intimate relationships today and how they develop and engage in these relationships.

### **Phenomenon of Abandonment Consequences**

In examining the issue of abandonment as it pertains to daughters, several prominent themes emerged. Abandonment is one of the universal attachment themes (Diamond, Diamond, & Levy, 2014). Abandonment is not bound by culture. It universally touches the hearts of females striving to be loved by those deemed important to them. Abandonment is an attachment rupture that can extend into the daughter's adult intimate romantic relationships.

Child abandonment can have negative effects on a daughter's development (Muntean, 2011). The World Health Organization (WHO) included 'abandonment' in their list of abuse and neglect by parents (Runyan, Wattam, Ikeda, Hassan, & Ramiro, 2002). They wrote that abandonment leaves an irreversible imprint on the psyche and development of the abandoned child. Father abandonment may also have an adverse effect on the socio-economic status of the abandoned child. This in turn affects the social status in her life.

Experts believed abandonment can have a myriad of effects on a child's social relationships that can continue on throughout adulthood (Moraru, 2014). Moraru wrote that the younger the child is at the time of abandonment, the more her/his development is negatively affected. Child abandonment may be the result of the father's fleeing, but it may leave the daughter behind in poverty, deprived of material needs, with needs of necessity (food, clothing, and shelter), and without a role model by which to gauge and judge her adult intimate romantic relationships. Those around the daughter, teachers and

other possible means of social support, are likely unaware of what she is going through mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially, and without support, her issues may intensify (Moraru, 2014).

### **Psychological Implications for Abandoned Daughters**

Daughters may tend to internalize the blame as being their fault when their fathers abandon them. It has been shown that a father's love and how he treats his daughter during childhood is important to her sense of self-worth, in the area of being lovable and being loved, as well as her ability to feel comfortable in her own sexuality (Secunda, 1992). Secunda (1992) wrote categories for fathers – doting, seductive, demanding, distant, or absent. A daughter may tend to try and fill in the blanks when a father is absent in an attempt to find out what she did wrong that would cause her father to abandon her in order to understand why he chose not to be part of her life.

### **Psychological Consequences**

A hole in the daughter's psyche may develop, leaving hurt in the daughter's heart and soul when abandoned by her father. It may lead to a hunger that triggers a search that can lead to crises in her adult intimate romantic relationships (Nielsen, 2011). She may strive to fill the void by becoming an overachiever at work or an underachiever that succumbs to drugs and alcohol as a way to alleviate the pain (Jensen et al., 1997; La Guardia et al., 2014; Krohn & Bogan, 2001). Some therapists gear treatment to attempt to ameliorate the pain and suffering left behind by the father's abandonment (Erickson, 1998). Daughter abandonment has been equated with the same level of distress as that of a father's death. The stages of grief and healing for a death (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) are mirrored in the stages of grief and healing from abandonment without the



finality of death. Grief processes have been created to allow the daughter to mourn her loss (Herring, 2005) and try to move past it. The five stages (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) the daughter abandoned by her father may attempt to process through are “denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.” These five stages do not always proceed in a certain order and some cases daughter’s may never reach the acceptance phase.

### **Physical Consequences**

A father’s abandonment of his daughter in the first seven years of her life has been thought to precipitate the early onset of her menstrual cycle and premature sexual precocity (Comings et al., 2002). This also in turn is thought to lead to less than healthy intimate romantic relationships in later life (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991). The earlier occurrence of the daughter’s menstrual cycle appears repeatedly in the publications of research studies as well as early sexual intercourse (Chisholm, Quinlivan, Peterson, & Coall, 2005), which points to the absence of the patriarchal role being a major contributor to maladaptive issues in the daughter’s development. While there are various theories regarding these areas, father abandonment should not be dismissed as causal.

## **Issues Experienced by Abandoned Daughters**

### **Psychological Consequences**

Abandoned children, specifically females, have a myriad of challenges. It has been noted that the lack of a father figure may influence adolescent girls as well as adult women to become more susceptible to poor self-esteem (Luo et al., 2012), accidental pregnancy (Quigley, 2003), unfulfilled educational potential (Krohn & Bogan, 2001), poverty (Haywood, 1995), developmental deficits (La Guardia et al., 2014) promiscuity

(Hendricks et al., 2005), and unstable relationships and divorce (Comings et al., 2002).

Each of these areas necessitates further examination.

### **Self-Esteem**

Coopersmith (1967) set forth a lasting definition of self-esteem as a “personal judgment of worthiness expressed in the attitudes individuals hold toward themselves” (p. 4-5). Self-esteem is thought to control each person's feelings of self-efficacy and to be central to her/his functioning and happiness (Maxwell & Bachkirova, 2010). Wolchik, Tein, Sandler, and Ayers (2006) wrote that if the child/adolescent/teen has good self-esteem, it can help them mediate abandonment. They also note that coping is significantly related to whether the child/adolescent/teen internalizes or externalizes psychological hurt. A study of 1,409 adolescents, 851 of which were female, showed a significant statistical relationship between the father not being present and lower self-esteem (Hendricks et al., 2005). Adolescents who grow up without fathers may struggle with lower self-esteem and the severity can depend upon the gender and the age of the subject at the time of father abandonment (Luo et al., 2012).

### **Accidental Pregnancy/Pregnancy**

The relationship that exists between a father and daughter impacts her psychosexual development (Williamson, 2004). There needs to be an erotic piece in a daughter's relationship with her father in order for her to arrive at her best psychosexual identity – the place in her mind where she sees herself fitting sexually into a man's life. While this seemingly incestuous relationship should remain metaphorical, it is a vital aspect of the female development sexually (Williamson, 2004). The father's attitude toward his daughter and/or women in general encourages the emergence of the daughter's

sense of her feminine self. The father may display actions valuing females thereby depicting positive, non-threatened feelings toward women or he may display a derogatory view. Either way may affect the daughter's psychosexual view of herself by self-introjection of attitudes from her father. Studies have shown that the absence of the father in the family is fundamentally linked to adolescent daughters having sexual encounters early and becoming pregnant during their teenage years (Ellis, Bates, Dodge, Fergusson, Horwood, Pettit, & Woodward, 2003). Ellis et al. (2003) followed 242 girls from the United States and 520 girls from New Zealand from the age of 5 to the age of 18 years. Being economically privileged neither deterred the sexual behavior nor the pregnancy (Ellis et al., 2003). The absence of the father in the daughters' lives had a profound impact on the daughters regardless of their ethnicity, i.e. whether they were white or black, or their socioeconomic status, i.e. whether they were poor or rich.

The onset of menarche has been reported to occur earlier in daughters with absent fathers (La Guardia et al., 2014). It stands to reason that early onset of menarche enables daughters to become pregnant earlier and a significant correlation arises between a girl getting her period and her becoming sexually active (La Guardia et al., 2014). In a study by Tither and Ellis (2008), where causal elements favored in evolutionary theory, such as genetics and environment, were controlled for, the results suggested that early onset of the father's disordered behavior, which resulted in the father leaving the home, frequently led to a substantially premature menarche. This in turn can lead to participating in sex at an early age and ultimately affecting the adult daughter's intimate romantic relationships.

The idea that an interest in having a baby produced early menarche is examined. In this study (Maestripieri, Roney, DeBias, Durante, & Spaepen, 2004) this idea was

explored using the visual stimuli of infant pictures. It was determined that daughters with absent fathers not only presented with earlier menarche, but they also were more attracted to the photographs of infants and reported feeling that they were ready for sex and parenthood perhaps to fill a void for attachment. While there are studies that relate the early onset of menarche to Body Mass Index (Abdulla & Ibraheem, 2010), infant feeding methods (Adgent, Daniels, Rogan, Adair, Edwards, Westreich, Maisonet, & Marcus, 2012), and even the relation between the second and fourth digits of the adolescent female hand (Oberg & Villamor, 2012), the research on the absence of a father and the onset of menarche should not be ignored or discounted.

### **Unfulfilled Educational Potential**

Without a present father, the daughter's cognitive development may be affected, which in turn affects her education (Krohn & Bogan, 2001). As previously stated, self-esteem and teenage pregnancy are issues of daughters of absent fathers and both influence education as well. Without the father present in their formative years, daughters may under perform on grade-level testing as well as on IQ testing (La Guardia et al., 2014; Krohn & Bogan, 2001). It has been noted that abandoned daughters lack confidence in their abilities in the areas of mathematics and science (La Guardia et al., 2014; Adams, Milner, & Schrepf, 1984). There is a tendency in college-attending daughters of absent fathers to either become underachievers or overachievers, which bears a resemblance to the need to cope with separation anxiety (Jensen et al., 1997; La Guardia et al., 2014; Krohn & Bogan, 2001).

### **Poverty**

Twenty-five percent of daughters whose mother and father divorce go through an entire year without spending any time with their father (Nielsen, 2011). Being impoverished is a prominent characteristic in daughters of absent fathers, and fathers who are impoverished often break contact with their daughters (Skevik, 2006). Some absent fathers view caring for children as restrictive to their personal freedom, burdensome financially, and a diminishment to their career and employment possibilities (Franklin, Makiwane, & Makusha, 2014).

### **Developmental Deficits**

Absent fathers impact the development of their daughters on different levels, and issues may continue throughout her lifetime. Cognitive developmental issues, including scores on intelligence-quotient (IQ) tests and school-based standardized testing, may be affected by the father's absence. The scores may become lower post father absence (La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014; Jensen et al., 1997). These lower scores can impact the daughters' present life as well as their college years and even their educational self-expectations and belief in one's self. Without a father figure at home, daughters may shy away from subjects, such as advanced mathematics and science (La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014; Adams et al., 1984). School frustration can lead to delinquency (Kira, Somers, Lewandowski, & Chiodo, 2012). The influence of the present father was most impactful in success at school: in grades, cognitive development, better behavior with student cooperation with their teachers and lower defiance to authority (Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, and Whitman, 2006).

The emotional developmental deficits affected by father absenteeism include the stunting of emotional growth and development (Kira et al., 2012). When fathers are

absent, a daughter's focus may shift from emotional growth and health to one of survival. Adolescents may tend to focus on the issue at hand and become right-now focused in order to deal with right-now issues.

### **Promiscuity**

A daughter's psychosexual development is inextricably linked with whether the father is present or absent. The search for a connection with a male to sate the emptiness left by the father who abandoned them may influence daughters to search for attachment in less-than-healthy ways. Abandoned daughters may become deficient in developing a sense of security with males after being abandoned by their father (La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014). The absence of a daughter's father in her life has been linked to a high risk for early onset sexual activity and pregnancy, and father presence in her life can ameliorate a daughter's risk-taking sexual behavior (Ellis, Bates, Dodge, Fergusson, Horwood, Pettit, & Woodward, 2003).

### **Unstable Relationships and Divorce**

Daughters abandoned by their fathers may be subjected to stressors of identifying how they will handle their relationships with little or no role model for reference. Abandonment issues not only may lead to early menarche and promiscuity but also to adult relationships that are unstable (Comings et al., 2002). Daughters of divorced parents may exhibit lower commitment to their own marriages. A parent's divorce also impacts the daughter's confidence in her relationship (Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2008).

Highlighted in her book on women and their fathers, Secunda (1992) wrote that some adult women who were abandoned by their father experience an inability to trust

men and to believe that they will not abandon them. Although there is a modest body of writings on fathers who abandoned their daughters, there is a gap in the literature regarding how those abandoned prior to turning 18 years of age are currently faring in terms of their intimate romantic relationships now as adult females and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Hence, the purpose of this study was to gain an insight and understanding into how daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are faring in terms of their intimate romantic relationships today as adult women. Moving beyond this literature, the review also included data regarding father abandonment, information on social constructionism, and a summary which highlights significant elements.

### **Summary**

The literature review research given in this literature review addresses consequences abandoned daughters have experienced due to being abandoned by their fathers. First, due to abandonment by their fathers, daughters have experienced many emotional and sexual issues, including poor self-esteem (Luo et al., 2012), accidental pregnancy (Quigley, 2003), and promiscuity (Hendricks et al., 2005). Second, their abandonment by their father has led to social and economic problems for the abandoned daughters, including unfulfilled educational potential (Krohn & Bogan, 2001), poverty (Haywood, 1995), and developmental deficits (La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014).

Third, relationship issues due to the abandonment follow many daughters into their adult life, leading to unstable relationships and divorce (Comings et al., 2002). The existing literature falls short in terms of where adult daughters who were abandoned by their fathers before the age of 18 are now in terms of their intimate romantic

relationships. Using screening questions and interviews questions, this study examined the stories and current relationship status of abandoned daughters, including at what age they were abandoned to where they are now in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships.

A dual purpose of this study was an endeavor to challenge practitioners to listen and respectfully investigate the current adult intimate romantic relationships of daughters abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18. Additionally, this study examined how the current adult intimate romantic relationships of daughters abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18, could possibly influence how practitioners view these adult women during the therapeutic process and incorporate such in the treatment and outcome of therapy. The altruism of the practitioner/client relationship encourages the shaping of the therapeutic process to bring about the desired therapeutic outcome. Every 'you' socially constructs a different 'view' (Gergen, 2009).

Gaps in the literature were evident based on there being no exploration of where these abandoned daughters are currently. While the current research provided symptomatology of abandoned daughters no research addressed at what age or stage they were abandoned and how they are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships. This qualitative study will assist in the understanding of where daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Utilizing social constructionism, stage of life at abandonment, and where they are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships will assist professionals in addressing issues that correlate to this abandonment to bring about understanding, therapeutic treatment



options, and facilitate positive social change. A method for examining such relationships will follow in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. A review of the existing literature unveiled a need for further qualitative, phenomenological studies that investigate the current intimate romantic relationships of adult daughters who experienced childhood paternal abandonment and how they develop and engage in these relationships. Writers have provided symptomatology of victims of abandonment but have not examined the victims' current status (Jensen et al., 1997; La Guardia, Nelson, & Lertora, 2014; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Comings et al., 2002; Luo et al., 2012; Quigley, 2003; Haywood, 1995; Hendricks et al., 2005). The purpose of this study was to assist a sample of these adult women in being heard by investigating adult daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are now in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. This chapter presents an overview of the design and rationale for this study. Interviews allowed these women to share their perspective about their adult relationship experiences. Specifically, this study explores the relationship between adult intimate romantic relationships and how being abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18 influenced process and outcome. Also, addressed will be the population and selection of participants and their protection, the role of the researcher, the instrumentation used, the collection, analysis, and treatment of the data, and finally the presentation of the findings.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study utilized the qualitative method of inquiry. With little specific prior research available, qualitative research was chosen over quantitative as the intended research design is exploratory by seeking answers through the narrative of participants. Creswell (2018) defined qualitative research as an avenue for investigating and understanding the meaning people assign to issues and experiences. Qualitative studies allow researchers to examine how each subject interprets the phenomena of their world and the meaning they make for themselves. The phenomenological strategy was chosen as it is best suited to answer the research questions by providing a detailed account of the essence and meaning of the lived experiences of all participants as described by Creswell (2018).

The research questions steering this study were designed to examine and fill the gap in the literature concerning where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships.

*RQ1:* How does a daughter being abandoned by her father prior to the age of 18 relate to where she is today in her adult intimate romantic relationships?

*RQ2:* What meanings do participants attach to relationships and relationship satisfaction as a result of their childhood experiences?

Implications lie in finding out where abandoned daughters are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and addressing issues that correlate to this abandonment in order to bring understanding, therapeutic treatment options, and facilitate positive social change. The intention is to help in the treatment of abandoned daughters

and as well as fathers considering not being in their daughter's lives, and assisting behavioral health care providers with treatment of abandoned daughters and the fathers.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in this study was to be an observer and primary facilitator. As a licensed professional counselor and life coach, the researcher has a vested interest in the data derived from the study. The interviews allowed participants to share their input on their perspectives of their young lives without their father and where they are now in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. The sample size was not predetermined but rather determined as appropriate saturation was achieved. Creswell (2013) wrote that sample size for a phenomenological study ranges from three to ten for saturation. Potential participants were screened using the Screening Questionnaire (see Appendix A). Qualitative interviews were conducted via telephone using adult females who met the criteria of having been abandoned by their father and who volunteered to be part of the study. There were no personal or professional relationships between the researcher and the participants, other than that of researcher and participant.

The researcher grew up in an intact family with a present and loving father. The researcher is a licensed professional counselor who sees and treats adult daughters whose fathers have abandoned them. To manage any researcher biases, the researcher maintained a journal as needed to manage thoughts, feelings, and any potential issues which can be shared with chairs. The researcher was mindful that personal interpretation of findings may be shaped by her own socially constructed worldview and may lead to biases in the study.

The researcher worked hard to respect the rights, needs, and any other ethical considerations for participants that were needed. Initial interviews were conducted and recordings were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher then interpreted the results and conducted member checking as needed by sharing the interpretation with participants to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2018). Written permission was also obtained from participants. Other ethical issues as applicable (these could include doing a study within one's own work environment, conflict of interest or power differentials, and justification for use of incentives) were considered and the plan for addressing these issues was developed.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized the qualitative method of inquiry. Qualitative studies allow researchers to examine how each subject interprets the social construction of their world and the meaning they make for themselves. The goal of this qualitative study was to gather information from the participants regarding abandonment and develop a complex picture of the issue phenomenologically. First a screening instrument (Appendix A) was administered to ensure participants met the criteria of having reached the age of majority and having been abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18. The participants in a qualitative study are purposefully selected (Creswell, 2018). Using interviews to study participants' phenomenology is a fortuitous amalgamation. Philosophically, it is not unlike a psychoanalytic interview with open ended questions designed to elicit information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By obtaining this data, a picture was drawn and colored to stimulate the reader and bring about discussion (Bellah, 1985). The researcher gathered the data and transcribed the audiotapes. The data were then analyzed.

Finally, the data will be made easily accessible to practitioners, educators, and researchers. The results from such activities will follow.

### **Participation Selection Logic**

Part of the participant population consisted of female students at Walden University. The university's participant pool was utilized. In order to participate in this study, the female college students had to have been abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18 and be willing to complete the screening questionnaire, a telephone interview, and any needed follow-up questions. These female college student participants ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate students who were 18 years of age and older. The university was selected due to it being the university the researcher was attending. Students could be from any program of study at Walden University. No other universities were considered. A convenience sampling was used because of the ease of access to participants. Convenience sampling allows researchers to easily recruit participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). After obtaining university permission, requests and criteria for participation were posted on student bulletin boards. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) also approved the researcher to recruit participants through local media channels such as Internet searchers and personal communications via e-mail correspondence. No clients past or present of the researcher were contacted or included. The researcher searched for potential participants through Internet searchers, personal communications, and responses from announcements through Facebook to gather contact information and to recruit participants. Women who expressed an interest were given the screening questionnaire and an informed consent questionnaire. The researcher developed the screening questionnaire (Creswell 2018), as a protocol for

collecting data to ensure participation criteria were met and some demographic data. Data were coded and recorded in a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel and ATLAS.ti 8 and handwritten charts to determine themes. Each participant was told they would be given a \$30.00 VISA gift card upon completion of their exit interview as compensation for the participant's time. The prerequisites for participation were listed on the online posting. Participants were continually invited until saturation was reached. Grounded theory is credited with introducing the idea of saturation (Creswell, 2018) which is when the data being gathered ceases to provide new insight or properties (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants were screened to ensure they met the inclusion criteria before they were administered the consent form. The consent form also addressed the issue that participation is optional and that they may withdraw from the study at any time but participants understood that only those who complete the study would be given the \$30.00 VISA gift card. The participants completed the screening questionnaire form and returned it to the researcher and then emailed their consent to the researcher. The questionnaire was designed to obtain biographical and personal information upon which the researcher could base questions in the interviews. Only females who stated they are 18 years of age and older and were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 were accepted into the study. The participants did not need to have been raised in the United States but this demographic data was collected for profile development. Women from different cultural backgrounds participated. The women were those who were raised by their biological mother so as to not bring in a factor that might skew the results and give the outcome another avenue of explanation. The screening questionnaire also asks income, level of education, and if the participant has children but these are not

requirements for participation. This demographic data was also collected for profile development purposes.

This study purposefully explored the relationship between father abandonment and current adult intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. The sample size was not predetermined but rather determined as appropriate saturation was achieved. It was noted there should be no less than 3 participants and more than 10 should not be required for adequate saturation to be achieved. Potential participants were screened using the Screening Questionnaire (see Appendix A). Qualitative interviews were conducted using adult females who self-identified in the questionnaire as having met the criteria of being at least 18 years of age or older and having been abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18 and volunteered to be part of the study. There are no personal or professional relationships between the researcher and the participants, other than that of researcher and participant.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

An instrument was required for this qualitative study (Creswell, 2018). The main instrument in this study was an open-ended interview questionnaire (see Appendix B). It was crafted to facilitate and allow flexibility for participants regarding the telling of their story. The interviews were conducted via telephone. The interview allowed the researcher to ask clarifying questions and take handwritten notes. Verbal and non-verbal behaviors were noted. These include tone, crying, laughing, and so forth. Participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity. A quiet setting congruous to conducting interviewing was selected. Participants were allowed a wide variety of choices of time slots to fit their needs as best as possible. Adequate time was allotted for



participants to reflect and give as much detail as they wanted to give. Researcher asked needed additional questions to help answer:

1. How old were they when their father abandoned them?
2. Where are they now in terms of their intimate romantic relationships?

The Screening Questionnaire (Appendix A) was used to ensure participants fit the criteria for inclusion in the study – including age, gender, abandonment prior to 18, intimate romantic relationship status, and ethnicity. All participants agreed to being interviewed via telephone and the interview being digitally recorded. Asking qualitative interview questions helped the researcher explore the meaning participants gave to their circumstances and experiences (Creswell, 2018). Asking open ended questions allowed the researcher the latitude to formulate further questions and dig deeper into meanings. Utilizing the answers given by participants, it was the desire of the researcher to interpret in a meaningful way the participants' reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The original research questions were the basis for this study which allowed development of secondary questions asked in the interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As depicted by Miles and Huberman (1994), the number of questions was not greater than 12.

The initial screening questionnaire was administered to ensure the participant meets the criteria to be included in the study. After being chosen to be in the study, open-ended questions were utilized. According to Merriam (2016), interview questions allow the qualitative researcher to ask questions that correlate to the situation at hand thereby allowing the participant to expound and clarify as follow-up questions were asked. Following the path of Social Constructionism, open-ended questions allowed the

researcher to listen and hear what each participant said about their lived experiences and world view (Creswell, 2018; see Appendix B).

Content validity was established by dissertation chairs. The researcher recorded all interviews. Researcher transcribed audiotapes verbatim. Audiotapes will be kept at least 5 years per Walden University policy and then destroyed. A field notebook was utilized as needed to keep notes including non-verbal cues noted by researcher. This notebook was also utilized to record the researcher's thoughts and experiences. Member checking was done as needed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Recordings will be saved on a password protected computer with a backup copy on a thumb drive stored in a personal, locked fire safe.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

There were four steps in the process of instrumentation and data collection;

1. Participants were screened by researcher using a researcher produced Screening Questionnaire (see Appendix A);
2. Recorded telephonic semi-structured interviews with each participant using researcher produced questions were conducted via telephone by researcher (see Appendix B);
3. Participants were allowed to do member checking;
4. Follow up interviews were conducted as necessary to clarify any questions by researcher.

Part of the participant population consisted of female students at Walden University. The university's participant pool was utilized. Participation requirements were posted. In order to participate in this study, the female college students had to have

been abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18 and be willing to complete the screening questionnaire, a telephone interview, and any needed follow-up questions. These female college student participants range from undergraduate to postgraduate students who are 18 years of age and older. The university was selected due to it being the university the researcher is attending. Students could be from any program of study at Walden. The IRB also approved (approval number: 08-09-17-0295937, expiration: July 29, 2019) the researcher to recruit participants through local media channels such as Internet searchers to locate participants and personal communications via e-mail correspondence. No clients past or present of the researcher will be contacted or included. The researcher was approved by the IRB to search for potential participants through Internet searches (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google), personal communications (email), and responses from announcements through Facebook to gather contact information and to recruit participants. The researcher announced the research project on Facebook. The prerequisites for participation were listed on the online posting for the study. Women who expressed an interest were given the screening questionnaire and an informed consent form. The researcher developed the screening questionnaire (Creswell 2018), as a protocol for collecting data to ensure participation criteria were met and some demographic data. Data were coded and recorded in a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel. After submission of the completed Screening Questionnaire (Appendix A) and consenting to the Informed Consent form, times for participant interviews were scheduled. If too few women were recruited the first go around, the request was left up online. Follow-up phone calls were used for clarification purposes or questions.

The primary source of data in this study was collected using semi-structured interviews with each participant. Open-ended questions allowed participants to tell their story (Creswell, 2018). Creswell (2018) wrote that in qualitative research researchers want to learn from the participant because the study is exploratory. To ensure confidentiality and participant privacy, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Interviews were conducted via telephone from the researcher's office where it was quiet. Time and date were set by letting the participants pick times and dates that fit their schedule well. Participants were given adequate time to feel comfortable in voicing their narrative. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions to clarify anything they did not understand. The researcher employed active listening to reflect back and ensure any ambiguity was understood. Researcher noted any participant feelings or nonverbal cues in an interview journal. Additional clarification was used to gain more depth and details as needed.

Lastly, as an exit interview strategy, member checking was utilized as needed thereby improving reliability and validity of the gathered information (Creswell, 2018). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim prior to data analysis. This created a way of establishing credibility for this qualitative study. This enhanced the validity of the study (Lincoln et al., 2011).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Qualitative data is subjective; therefore, the researcher examined the essence of participants' experiences by allowing them to describe the phenomena as they experienced it (Creswell, 2018). The interviews were digitally recorded to allow the researcher to listen to them multiple times for clarification. Follow-up telephonic

interviews were conducted as needed with participants for member checking purposes. This validation strategy communicated the general codes, patterns, and themes gleaned from the interviews to the participants to ensure that the results are appropriate.

All participants were coded starting with the first interviewee being P1.

Qualitative interviews collect copious amounts of rich data such that not all is able to be used. Creswell (2018) noted that five to seven themes are usually chosen. While some interviews were in process, the researcher was analyzing other participants' interviews. This is where the researcher aggregated the data into themes. The qualitative process was iterative and recursive in order to find commonalities and patterns. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the study using coding. Participants were reminded of confidentiality throughout the process. The recordings assisted in the sorting of the narrative findings.

Participant interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using the pseudonym of 'P1' and so forth for each participant helped disassociate participants from their responses and helped eliminate any bias (Creswell, 2018). In this qualitative research study, the data collection was indexed using as many categories as justified in hope of identifying thematic patterns of participants. Patterns continued to emerge as the data was reviewed again and again. The qualitative data was coded using categories to identify as many as possible. These detailed categories help ensure transferability. Database software was utilized to enter, maintain, organize, and study the data. Multiple verification strategies and objective interpretation as well as detailed descriptions of all aspects of the study were used to ensure trustworthiness, reliability, and validity. The age at which the daughter was abandoned by her father was noted as well as the

corresponding Erikson psychosocial stage. The effects of his abandonment upon her life were examined as well as the status of her current intimate romantic relationship. Her expectations for intimate romantic partners were examined. To what she attributes relationship success and failure was examined. Personal expectations of herself in her intimate romantic relationship was examined. Coping skills were examined and documented. The narrative text provided a holistic picture of participants' experiences and the meanings they assign to them. Discrepancies were ameliorated by utilizing follow-up interviews as needed to clarify these discrepancies.

### **Trustworthiness**

Guba (1981) addressed the needed constructs to establish trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Miles and Huberman (1994) expanded on these constructs. The constructs to establish trustworthiness in qualitative studies were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility answers the question: Are the findings congruent with reality? (Merriam, 1998; Shento 2004). Credibility was supported by the accurate information solicited from participants. It is a true representation of each participants' perspective. Established methods such as Guba's (1981) constructs were utilized to allow qualitative researchers to conduct individual interviews using only participants who are genuinely interested in honestly contributing (Shento, 2004). Trustworthiness included transferability. To meet these criteria, the findings of this study are applicable to other situations. The interview data will be valid for other studies of women abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships.

Next is dependability. Data was elicited directly from participants in this study. The interviews were done via telephone with researcher and participant. Other researchers can use these same questions to replicate the findings. Lastly, confirmability is present in the data collected. These attributes confirm the practical integrity of this study. This repetitive process and analysis of each participant's interview along with member checking allowed the achievement of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981). The design of the study along with the meticulous execution of the study confirm trustworthiness.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The Office of Research Integrity and Compliance was contacted at Walden University. Walden University has a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) specifically for Individual Investigators. This SOP was followed by the investigator. After approval, advertisements were placed on online bulletin boards. Those who desired to participate sent an email to the researcher stating such.

No part of this study was conducted until the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) had reviewed and approved the proposal. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Human Subjects Protection Training has been completed by the researcher. Participants were provided a copy of the consent form which explained the background and purpose of the study, procedures of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks and benefits of being in the study, payment, privacy, and contact information for the IRB. The data including digital recordings, transcripts of the recordings, and any notes are kept under lock and key in a fireproof safe. Any computerized data is password protected. All data was designated to be permanently and securely destroyed at the end of the requisite 5-year period. Participant names were assigned a pseudonym for

confidentiality. Member checking was completed with all participants thereby improving reliability and validity of the gathered information (Creswell, 2018). No one participant was previously known by the researcher to avoid the possibility of conflicts of interest.

All participants in this study were at least 18 years of age. After the initial screening questionnaire, participants received an informed consent form which included specifics of the study. Following Standard 4.02(a) and 4.02(b) of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2010) guidelines the informed consent, limits of confidentiality, and how the information will be used was discussed with all participants. To ensure participant privacy, participants names will not be released or referenced. All participants willingly gave their informed consent to participate in the study. The consent form delineated how the researcher manages the data and protects participant's identities and confidentiality. The informed consent explained how the data will be stored in a locked fire safe cabinet to which only the researcher has access and a password secured computer to which only the researcher has access. The destruction of the recording was also addressed in the informed consent form. The Institutional Review Board of Walden University evaluated and approved the study on August 9, 2017. The informed consent gave the participants information on the researcher. No data was collected until informed consents were signed and returned to the researcher. The informed consent included a 'no penalty' clause for participants who wanted to withdraw early from the study.

Standard 8 (APA, 2010) provides the guidelines for research and publication. Due to being abandoned by their fathers before they reached the age of 18, participants in this study were considered to be an at-risk population. Due to their possible vulnerability and the fact that the questions might generate a variety of uncomfortable feelings,



measures were put in place to protect the participants from harm and minimize vulnerabilities (Fisher, 2013). Participation in this study was voluntary but as an incentive to complete the study each participant was told they would be given a \$30.00 VISA gift card upon completion of their exit interviews as compensation for their time. This incentive is addressed in this study's informed consent form.

### **Summary**

This ethnographic study revealed the perspectives of women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. An ethnographic approach was utilized when conducting recorded interviews with participants. The recordings were transcribed and the data analyzed.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions:

*RQ1:* How does a daughter being abandoned by her father prior to the age of 18 relate to where she is today in her adult intimate romantic relationships?

*RQ2:* What meanings do participants attach to relationships and relationship satisfaction as a result of their childhood experiences?

To fulfill this purpose, open-ended interview questions were designed to provide the researcher with relevant guidelines to build upon. These questions did not encompass how the interview would evolve. This chapter includes the demographics of each participant, data collection, data analysis including themes and sub-themes, how the participants coped, their current relationships, whether or not they have received therapy, their expectations in an intimate romantic relationship, and their expectations of themselves in an intimate romantic relationship. Also addressed are the psychosocial stages correlating to the age of their abandonment for each participant.

### Setting

Part of the participant population consists of female students at Walden University. The university's participant pool was utilized. Participation requirements were posted. In order to participate in this study, the female participants had to have been abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18 and be willing to complete the screening

questionnaire, a telephone interview, and any needed follow-up questions. The female college student participants ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate students who were 18 years of age and older. The university was selected due to it being the university the researcher is attending. Students could be from any program of study at Walden. No other universities were considered. The IRB also approved (approval number: 08-09-17-0295937, expiration: July 29, 2019) the researcher to recruit participants through local media channels such as Internet searchers and personal communications via e-mail correspondence. No clients, past or present, of the researcher were contacted or included in this study. The researcher searched for potential participants through Internet searches (via Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google), personal communications (email), and responses from announcements through Facebook to gather contact information and recruit participants. The researcher announced the research project on Facebook. Women who expressed an interest were given the screening questionnaire and an informed consent form.

### **Demographics**

Ten women contacted the researcher via email indicating a desire to participate in this study. Of the 10 women, only eight were used as one did not respond and another responded after saturation was met. Each of the eight participants completed the screening questionnaire and emailed their consent.

Participants completed the Screening Questionnaire (Appendix A) and emailed it to the predesignated email address for the study. They also emailed their consent to participate. All participants were born female and ranged in age from 33 to 70, were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18, and self-identified on the Screening

Questionnaire (Appendix A) as having been raised by their biological mothers. Their self-identified demographic data are found in Table 1.

Table 1:

*Demographic Information - Participants' Age, Race/Ethnicity, Current Romantic Relationship, Education, Raised in US, and Children*

Participant	Age at time of interview	Race/Ethnicity	Current romantic Relationship	Education	Raised by Bio Mom	Raised in US	Children
P1	48	White	No	Master's	yes	yes	no
P2	65	European Descent German/Irish Bohemian /French	yes (married but says the romance isn't there)	working on Ph.D.	yes	yes	4
P3	33	White/Latino	Yes	some college	yes	yes	2 step children
P4	44	White	Yes	high school graduate	yes	yes	1
P5	50	German	Yes	Master's	yes	yes	2
P6	65	Caucasian non-Hispanic	No	Registered Nurse	yes	yes	3
P7	40	African American	Yes	Master's Degree working on PhD	yes	yes	2
P8	70	African American	No	Ph.D. Candidate	yes	yes	2

Each participant spoke freely and candidly about her father's abandonment and the impact it has had on her lives.

**Participant 1 (P1):**

P1 is a 48-year-old Caucasian female. She is a twin. She has been married twice. She was married the first time at the age of 19 to an abusive, emotionally unavailable alcoholic. Her second marriage was when she was 27 and he was 33. This relationship was successful, but he died suddenly after only 3 years of marriage. She has a master's degree and is working on her Ph.D. Her father is deceased.

**Participant 2 (P2):**

P2 is a 64-year-old female of European descent (German/ Irish Bohemian/French) and the oldest of a set of twins. She had been married 40 years as of our interview. She has four grown children. She was 9 years old when her father left. She got a doctor to sign her out of school at the age of 14. She told her mother that she was not going to run away but she "needed to leave with her blessings." Her mother gave her blessing. She told her mother that she "needed to go and experience the world." She went to Miami. She did some traveling and worked down in Miami. She also traveled and worked in New York City. All of her friends were older. In New York, she got a job at an art gallery on Madison Avenue. Despite dropping out of high school, she has a Master's Degree and is working on her Ph.D. Her father is deceased.

**Participant 3 (P3):**

P3 is a 33-year-old female of Caucasian and Latino descent. She is currently in a romantic relationship with a man, and he has two children. She was 18 months old when her father moved from Hawaii to California. She and her mother moved to California when she was 3 years old, and she saw her father sporadically. She was 9 years old when he left for good. When she was in college, he got in touch and called and left her a voice

message. She stated, “I didn’t even know he had an accent. So, hearing his voice really stung for me. To not recognize your own father’s voice is – at 19 years old – is kind of jarring.” Her father is still alive.

**Participant 4 (P4):**

P4 is a 44-year-old Caucasian female. She has currently been married for 3 years. She has one child. Her dad left when she was less than 2-years-old. He was “pretty much gone” until she was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (she refused to call him dad – she called him Mike). Out of the blue, he sent her a random card on her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. She said, “Of my friends, I think I’m that one – that special one – with the ‘real winner’ of a dad.” He never paid child support. Her mother worked three jobs to support her and her brother. His second wife has the same name as P4 so she felt he had a constant reminder that he had a daughter, but it did not matter. She stated, “Yeah, he was a real peach.” Her father is still alive.

**Participant 5 (P5):**

P5 is a 50-year-old female of German descent. She has been married 20 years. They have two children. Her father left when she was 5 years old. Her father skipped around a lot to avoid paying child support. Her father is deceased. She said, “He had a problem with alcohol.” Also, “He actually died from alcohol poisoning – he drank himself to death really.” After he died, she found out things she never knew about him. For example, he had earned a Purple Heart for his service in the military.

**Participant 6 (P6):**

P6 is a 64-year-old female who identifies as Caucasian/non-Hispanic. She is a Registered Nurse. Her father left when she was 9 years old. She is an identical twin.

She had three marriages, and they all ended in divorce. She is not currently in a relationship. She has custody of her 4 grandchildren. She feels that “I am where I’m supposed to be.... They needed my help.... If I had a man, I would probably not be – I probably would had to have said no to these kids.” Her father is deceased.

**Participant 7 (P7):**

P7 is a 40-year-old African-American female who is working on her Ph.D. She has been married 5 1/2 years:

I was pregnant thinking about how I was going to navigate that relationship [between the child and husband] and how I was going to feel about that. Like if there's going to be a little jealousy for me and also what it would be to parent together because that was a very strange concept.

It was difficult for her to adapt to the idea of co-parenting because growing up in her house her mom was the “first and the last.” She states that “The idea of having to talk with someone and make compromises on the rearing of my children that was really foreign.” She does not know if her father is dead or alive.

**Participant 8 (P8):**

P8 is a 70-year-old African American female. She is not currently in a relationship. She has been married twice, and she thinks she was just using a man to take the place of her father and “feeling, you know, not worthy and low self-esteem feeling like I had to just have a man.” She wanted a man in her life because she grew up without a father. She stated, “So, my thing was – I got to have a man in my life. No, I don't. I realize I don't need it anymore and it has to be the right man. Right now, I'm not focused on him. I'm focused on helping myself.” She does not know if her father is dead or alive

because she stopped looking. She topped trying to find out. If her father is alive, he would be around 91.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through screening questionnaires and semi-structured interviews of eight participants who met the criteria of being abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and who volunteered to be part of the study. IRB approval (approval number: 08-09-17-0295937, expiration: July 29, 2019) was given to use Walden University's participant pool. In order to participate in this study, the potential participants had to have been abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18 and be willing to complete the screening questionnaire, a telephone interview, and any needed follow-up questions. In order to try to reach more potential participants, the IRB also approved the researcher to recruit participants through local media channels such as Internet searchers to locate participants and personal communications via e-mail correspondence. No clients past or present of the researcher were contacted or included. The researcher searched for potential participants through Internet searches (via Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google), personal communications (email correspondence), and responses from announcements through Facebook to gather contact information and to recruit participants. The researcher announced the research project on Facebook. The researcher was contacted via email by those who were interested in participating. The screening questionnaire and informed consent were then emailed to the potential participant. Ten women emailed an interest but only eight were utilized as one did not respond back and another one responded after saturation was met. All eight gave their informed consent to be participants. It took a few months to acquire eight participants.



Interviews were conducted via telephone using a digital recorder from the researcher's office where it is quiet and private. Time and date for the interview was set by letting the participants pick times and dates that fit their schedule. Open-ended interview questions were utilized (see Appendix B). Participants were given adequate time to feel comfortable in voicing their narrative. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions to clarify anything they did not understand. Handwritten notes were also taken during the interview. The researcher asked clarifying questions. Each interview was transcribed. At the beginning of the interview with P4, the tape recorder was not recording, but copious handwritten notes were being taken by the research. The tape recorder not recording was rectified and the recording was fixed and any necessary questions asked prior were asked again and recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

Digital interviews were transcribed verbatim. After transcriptions were complete, the essence of participants' experiences was examined throughout the transcripts. Second telephonic interviews were conducted as necessary for member checking purposes. This validation strategy communicates the general codes, patterns, and themes gleaned from the interviews to the participants to ensure that the results are appropriate.

Interviews and notes were read and reread to ensure familiarity. Participants were assigned pseudonyms using P (for participant) and a number for the order in which they were interviewed (P1 through P8) and then analyzed using Microsoft Excel, ATLAS.ti 8, and handwritten charts to determine themes. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the study using coding. Creswell (2013) denoted that five to seven themes are usually chosen. The qualitative process is iterative and recursive – meaning it finds the

commonalities and patterns. The data revealed seven main themes. These themes are (a) harnessing childhood experiences of paternal abandonment, (b) trust issues (transitioning from abandoned adolescent daughter to adult daughter), (c) things she needed from a father growing up, (d) how did you cope, (e) current status of your relationship journey, (f) therapeutic interventions, and (g) expectations in an intimate romantic relationship (what she needs now). The sub themes, are (a) he chose his other family – I felt there was something wrong with me, (b) father abandoned her again – monetarily, and (c) expectations of yourself in an intimate romantic relationship.

After compiling the data from the transcribed interviews of the eight participants in this study, saturation was deemed to have been met. Saturation in qualitative data collection is deemed to have been met when “fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (Creswell, 2018). See Table 2 and Table 3 below.

Table 2: *Themes – Participant Responses*

Theme/Subtheme	Theme	Total
Harnessing childhood experiences of paternal abandonment	1	8
He chose his other family - I felt there was something wrong with me.	1.1	6
Father abandoned her again - monetarily	1.2	5
Trust issues (transitioning from abandoned adolescent daughter to adult daughter)	2	6
Things she needed from a father growing up	3	8
How did you cope?	4	8
Current status of your relationship journey	5	8
Yes (2 of which are not intimate)		5
No		3
Therapeutic Interventions	6	4
Expectations in an intimate romantic relationship (what she needs now)	7	8
Expectations of yourself in an intimate romantic relationship	7.1	8

Table 3:

*Themes/Subthemes from Table 2*

Participant	Theme 1: Harnessing childhood experiences of paternal abandonment
P1	Molested; court order visitation; date raped; [doesn't] have good boundaries
P2	[had the] perfect life, best Christmas was the last Christmas together, became promiscuous, quit school at 14, drugs, older friends
P3	sensitive to being neglected, no feelings, hard shell
P4	financially neglected
P5	Dad just kind of walked out; said he would visit; didn't show up; she thought it was something she did
P6	sought the attention of men and gave her body to them...
P7	never a relationship after 5/6 months old; doesn't even know what he looks like
P8	father's family didn't want him having anything to do with her because from the wrong side of the tracks

Participant	Theme 1.1: He chose his other family. I felt there was something wrong with me.
P1	Father cheated with godmother; like an episode of Jerry Springer; father married godmother; had 3 other kids and took care of them; abandoned us for his other family.
P2	Father was a Mensa member; wrote beautiful Haiku; had women in Japan in military; he kept a list of the women
P3	She has 3 stepsisters and half-sister and a half-brother he did not abandon; they say she was better off; but it didn't feel that way to her.
P4	She has a half-sister that found her; she always thought half-sister was the lucky one because her father wanted to have something to do with her; she wondered what she did that made him not want her
P7	She wanted to find him using technology; her grandfather would not let her; her father was in the military; had a daughter older than her
P8	Her father's mother forbade him having contact with her; he chose his birth family over her; left her so poor had to fight a rat for a piece of food

Theme 1.2: Father abandoned her again – monetarily
P1, P3, P4, and P5 fathers avoided child support. P8's had a court hearing but she was left in poverty.

Participant	Theme 2: Trust issues (transitioning from abandoned adolescent daughter to adult daughter)
P1	She can't open up emotionally; attracts people that are emotionally unavailable; gets involved with abusive men/alcoholics; felt like she had to be with a man
P3	She doesn't trust people; has a really hard time with trust; abandonment issues; been really angry her whole life
P4	When young would go with anyone that gave her attention; Mr. Right Now; trust factor and just I didn't want to get close to people.
P5	She had a lot of issues with trust; did not trust; still has some of those issues; abandonment issues.
P6	After father left she suffered: depression, poor relationships, bad relationships, identity issues, and anxiety; didn't know her role as a female; was searching for love; wanting to be loved; did drugs and alcohol; started using alcohol around 13; having sex at 14
P7	Was married for about 8 months; tried to fix them; stayed too long; not a very good judge of character; stayed in situations too long.

Participant	Theme 3: Things she needed from a father growing up
P1	care, concern, protection, guidance ... showing me by example.
P2	security, leader, leadership in many different areas – spiritual leadership, financial leadership; the logical, rational person; intelligent, kind, caring, honest, genuine, motivated, dedicated, committed
P3	honest and loving; supportive and kind
P4	compassion and being treated like a lady by a man; how to take care of mechanical things; daddies are supposed to be a role model; the leader; backbone; when things are bad, they pull it together
P5	instilling that sense that the daughter is worth it; the father; that's your first love
P6	father should not party with his children; protector; let me down as a child but as an adult he was there
P7	definitely be the protector and encourager; demonstrates to how should be treated
P8	shows me my femininity; who I am as a woman

Participant	Theme 4: How did you cope?
P1	they called her mommy; she always trying to take care of everyone else: she taught herself not to feel; her feelings would be disregarded; felt invisible
P2	left home early; quit school; got doctor's excuse; nervous breakdown if I don't quit school; so doctor wrote her a letter.

(table continues)

P3	a whole lot of not coping well; in therapy now; was really promiscuous when young; drugs; drank; blocked the sadness however she could
P4	a close church friend told her that she that kid that was hard to get close to; she keeps a wall up; doesn't trust people with her feelings
P5	didn't cope well; wrote people off very easily; coped well by not blaming self; blamed him; distrusting of men.
P6	tried every drug there was; heroin and morphine and meth; was really searching for love; get involved with church big help for her
P7	coping was unhealthful ways; if had a father to protect her - to tell of hurt - might have helped her.
P8	choosing men; believed everything they said; not interested in her; she wholeheartedly would fall in love; didn't have a father to teach me; if her father was there she could have learned and saved a lot of hardship; financially needed a father; they had to fight a rat for a piece of meat.

Participant	Theme 5: Current status of your relationship journey
P1	not in a current relationship; it's scary; anxiety attacks; rather be alone than deal with that; not a good track record with men; except one
P2	Married; children are grown; husband stepped out; she still in the relationship for our children; stays knowing it could change; feels children want their parents together
P3	good and bad; bad she thinks has to do with her parents; she hasn't dealt with things; thankful for partner; she has abandonment issues; been really angry her whole life.
P4	her current relationship "is everything a girl could dream for. It's love. It's compassion. He's a caregiver. We enjoy each other's company. He supports my son in a great way and he's a good role model."
P5	married almost 20 years; no intimacy but was at the beginning; kids; existing in the same house; it's kind of sad.
P6	not in a relationship; last relationship when 27-year-old daughter was 3; he chose drinking over her; "I don't have one now and I don't see any one - any in the future and I would say it was because I don't know how to have one."
P7	said her relationship is fine – mostly centered around their kids more than the two of them; said healthy relationship - then "I feel unhappy in my current relationship and all these areas with room for improvement and I'm not sure that it's an improvement with not really knowing what I want or can expect..."
P8	when asked about current relationship replied, "Yes, with myself. I just came out that relationship the first of the year and I've been by myself in my home and you know just thanking God for being alive - that's where I'm at now" and she's comfortable with it. "I'm enjoying it really."

Participant	Theme 6: Therapeutic interventions
P1	did attend therapy
P2	she has “been to counseling - in fact tomorrow I have an appointment.”
P5	Yes. “My therapist also told me that I was going to have a really hard time maintaining relationships.” That level of trust is gone; when you're a little girl your father is like the first man in your life; the first relation where you have that person; that male figure - that role model and then when they just take up and go - what are you supposed to think? She felt that “people are replaceable” because she had been left so many times. “I didn’t have that solid ground.”
P6	“I’ve spent so much money in counseling.” One in particular really helped.

Participant	Theme 7: Expectations in an intimate romantic relationship (what she needs now)
P1	“I think that I am needy. When things are good, I want a lot of attention and affection.”
P2	In spite of her husband of 40 years’ infidelity she still expects a monogamous relationship - where a couple falls in love - beautiful and creative and all that is good.
P3	Doesn’t have expectations; she has wants - honesty and loyalty and intimacy.
P4	Wants him to be “kind, compassionate, be there, be involved, be a role model.”
P5	Wants him “to be honest, loyal, to show affection” and “should be better together as two.”
P6	“My expectations would definitely be somebody I could trust if - if I can trust anybody.” They should be “willing to stick it out.”
P7	Fidelity is number one; stability; not a lot of drama; really liking each other; fidelity, stability, and a sense of maybe camaraderie.
P8	“I don't need to cater to the man because when I was with my husbands, I always catered to them. I'm always subservient to them.” She did whatever they asked her to do. “I would do it and neglected myself. I was always - it's always about everybody else but me and now I'm selfish.”

Participant	Subtheme 7.5: Expectations of yourself in an intimate romantic relationship
P1	give the person “the respect and consideration he deserves” - sometimes feels like she’s closing up...sometimes she wants to be “mean to them” feels like if she opens up then she’ll be vulnerable.

*(table continues)*

P2	supported, secure, safe, loved, and it's not one sided; time for one another.
P3	expects honesty and loyalty from herself towards her partner.
P4	Wants “to grow old together - sitting on rockers watching the sunset on a porch.”
P5	To “go with the flow you know - not try to put a time line on things - things happen as they happen” and “appreciate what they do instead of focusing on what they don't do.”
P6	Stated her expectations of herself are, “To share. To laugh. To love. To do things that we both enjoy. To grow old together. Yeah, that’s what I would like.”
P7	Wants to be “open and honest and direct but ... there's always this sense of how vulnerable do I want to be?” On myself would be to both open and honest and little guarded to be safe.”
P8	Says, “My expectation right now is that I'm not really looking for someone.” “When I do speaking engagements and conferences, they’re formal - my thinking because I come from that generation - you need to be escorted by man to the event.” “I'm not into romantic piece - in my head I'm not trying to get a romance - I'm not trying to get you to go to bed with me that's not where I'm at.”

### **Harnessing Childhood Experiences of Paternal Abandonment**

P1 was 13 years old when her father left for good. At the age of 3, she was molested by her father. This was back in the 1970s and she was still court ordered to attend visitation with him along with her two sisters. When she was in university, she was date raped and she did not report it. She stated, “I was just like whatever I guess I have to say yes kind of thing and so I don't have boundaries – good boundaries.”

P2 was 9 years old when her dad left but prior to that, she said they had the perfect “Leave it to Beaver, Father Knows Best,” life. Her father served in the Air Force and America had just gone through the Cuban Missile Crisis. Her family thought it might be their last Christmas because of this. She said, “We had the best Christmas.” Then suddenly one day shortly thereafter, they moved to where her grandmother lived and they never went back with her father. It was a surprise when her father left. After this, she

became promiscuous. She feels she did this because she did not have a father figure to guide her. She had a doctor give her a note and she quit school at 14 years old. She drank and did some illegal substances. All her friends were 10 years older than her.

P3 was 18 months old when her father moved. She was 9 years old when he left for good. She's very sensitive to feeling neglected. She said, "I never really let myself feel when I was growing up." She wanted to have a hard shell – a "hard exterior where nobody knew how hurt I was and up until a couple years ago, I didn't really let myself feel." She also has OCD. Her father told her "sometimes life sucks." These were his words after her husband died. She said, "I'm like really? You were the first person to teach me that. I'm pretty aware that life sucks (laughs). I grew up without a dad."

P4 was less than 2 years old when her father left. Her dad never paid child support. He blamed it on the fact that every time he came around her mother would take him to court for child support. So, he felt "he couldn't come around because he couldn't pay, because you know he was in and out of rehabs."

P5 was 5 years old when her father left. She stated, "All I remember is that you know there wasn't much talk about it. He just kind of walked out." "He would call to come, like he was going to come pick me up . . . but he would never show up." He vanished out of her life up until she was about 18. "You know you as a child you just don't understand. You think it's something that you did."

P6 was about 9 years old when her father left. She sought out the attentions of men and gave of her body freely in the search for love and wanting to be loved at the age of 14. Her father was in the Air Force. He paid her mother \$100 a month from the time he left until she died. P6 is a Registered Nurse.



P7 was 5 or 6 months old when her father left so there was never a relationship with him. She has never seen a picture of him nor does she know anyone in his family.

P8 stated that her mother got pregnant the first time she ever had sex and it was with P8's father. Her mother was a riveter in the war helping to make airplanes. His family was what she termed bourgeoisie. As her mother tells it, her father's father was excited about the baby but his mother was not. Her grandmother "encouraged my father not to associate with my mother because first of all she was from the wrong side of the tracks and her hands were being deformed at that point (from arthritis)."

**He Chose His Other Family. I felt there was something wrong with me.**

There must be something wrong with me. Several participants expressed frustration of not only being abandoned but there being other children from different relationships not abandoned and well provided for.

P1 revealed that her mother married her father at the age of 19 and he was an abusive alcoholic. Her father cheated on her mother with P1's godmother. In her words she described it as being like an episode of Jerry Springer. Her father married "that woman" and had three more kids that he took care of. She said, "I can tell you from my experience as a child, I have no idea how to have a healthy relationship. None. None." She believes she is missing the male perspective. She stated, "I never knew what a real healthy marriage was looking like from a male perspective...I think that impacted my perspective on relationships as an adult." "He left. Abandoned us...to be with his other family."

P2's father was a Mensa member. She said he wrote beautiful Haiku. After his death she found a list her father had made and kept of all the women he father had been with while in the military in Japan.

P3 stated that she has:

3 stepsisters and half-sister and a half-brother on my dad's side and from everything that they've said in my adult life it pretty much sounds like I was better off without him but that doesn't undo all the (ironic laughing) years of childhood that I didn't feel that way.

P4 has a half-sister that found her and they reconnected. P4 stated, "You know I always thought she was the lucky one" because her sister was the one her father "wanted and wanted to have something to do with in life." She could not understand why her father didn't want to see her or "what did I do to piss him off?" When she met up and talked with her sister, her sister said, "I thought you were the lucky one because you got away from him." She learned that her father had her sister "on drugs by the time she was 12 years old and by the time she was 13 she (her sister) had a needle in her arm."

P5's father did not have another family.

P6 did not mention any other family or affairs.

P7 has no idea where her father is or even if he's alive. She said, "I remembered three or four years where I had this inclination that, you know, that technology is out there I should probably find him." Her grandfather became "really stern with me once and he said no it's not your responsibility to find him, he needs to find you and that was the end of the story."

P8 states her father's mother "influenced my father to not have any relationship with my mother." P8 stated that when she was born "he didn't deny me and say I wasn't his child – he knew I was his child and what they did was they made sure they made those payments to [my mom] to take care of me every month." While they did receive the money, "There was no relationship with me and them or her and them." So, her dad chose his birth family over his family.

**Father Abandoned Her Again.** P1, P3, P4, and P5's fathers would get found and their mothers would file for back child support and to restart child support and he would quit his job and move away. P8, despite the monthly payments, still lived in poverty even though her father was quite well off.

**Trust Issues (Transitioning from Abandoned Adolescent Daughter to Adult Daughter)**

P1: I can't open up emotionally to other people so I think I attract people that are emotionally unavailable to me.... I get involved with abusive men that are alcoholic and at first, I felt like I needed to be with a man because I think that's what my mother felt like – she had to be with a man.

P3: I don't trust people. I have a really hard time with trust.... I don't trust people. I have abandonment issues – like (nervous laugh) – so I've been really angry my whole life. I've just been a really angry person – and I don't like it – I try not to be but it's like I have this anger brewing inside of me all the time.

P4: When I was young I would go with anyone that gave me attention. I was looking for Mr. Right Now. When I was young I was drawn to anyone that gave

me attention. I married at 21, divorced at 31, and was single 11 years before marrying again. It was a trust factor and just I didn't want to get close to people.

P5: I had a lot of issues with trust. I did not trust – it took me – and I still think I have some of those issues. I guess abandonment issues. People always leave.... I had a lot of trust issues.

P6: Stated that with her father leaving she suffered, “depression, poor relationships, bad relationships, identity issues, and anxiety.” She explained her identity issues as not knowing “what my role is as a female.”

I was raised very traditionally in the 50's where women were not expected to or encouraged to go to college but we had a strong sense of work, you know, work ethic but expected to marry and stay home and take care of the family and I didn't know really who I was, what I was all about.... So, at a very young age I sought out the attentions of men, gave of my body freely for the searching of love – wanting to be loved. I also started doing drugs and alcohol... I started using alcohol around 13 and I think I had my first sexual relationship which was really nothing at 14.

[Later in life] From a physical point I would have to say that probably I dominated and I definitely would get my way in what I wanted but I think as far as more depth and intimacy and really feeling love and like you're best friends – no. [She attributes her success] to just knowing what I want. Knowing my body...but from the lack of emotional success, I would say not knowing how to respond or how to get a man's affection. [Now] Well, my expectations would

definitely be somebody that I could trust if – if I can trust anybody. I don't know.

That's a good question.

P7: Felt that her lack of success was that she did not fix them (first two marriages).

I would say the first one I was married for about 8 months...it was awful. I think part of it – the beginning of it was – actually both of them in the sense of that I needed to help these people and they needed my help and so, you know, that whole like I'm going to help fix you and it turned into – kind of situation and I think I stayed even though even though I didn't want to because I needed it to be successful for everyone else. I remember calling my mom and I knew it was over and crying – not because my marriage was over but because I was afraid I was disappointing her, which is absurd because my mom never gets disappointed in me; but I remember just feeling like everyone else failed, if I failed in the marriage and that's the painful part of it was – was just that I had to let people know that I had failed and that and it had really little to do with he and I not being together anymore and that loss of intimacy – it didn't bother me. It was just that I was failing and he was just really emotionally abusive and he had his own issues and I was going to help him work through it and of course his emotional issues turned on me and I became a problem for him. And so, I was not a very good judge of character and I stayed in situations way longer than I should have.

In her current relationship she said she does check-ins: He probably thinks I'm crazy but I feel the need to check in – like how's it going, how are we going – just a little bit of anxiety pops up in me and he's – I'm here, I'm here for the Long Haul

– I'm good – you know (laughing) and that kind of thing and so I do those little kinds of reassurance because things do come up for me a little bit but I think that's what makes it successful is that we just decided that it will be.

### **Things She Needed from a Father Growing Up**

P1: P1 lists “care and concern, protection, guidance – showing me by example what a husband should be.”

P2: P2 lists security, leader, leadership in many different areas – spiritual leadership, financial leadership; the logical, rational person. “You know intelligent, kind, caring, honest, genuine, motivated, dedicated, committed – you know, all those expectations that you would want in a relationship.”

P3: P3 lists “(nervous laughing) attributes (muttering) they should bring? I feel like they should be honest and loving and well they should – they should – be supportive and kind.”

P4: P4 describes the attributes that a father needs to bring to the father/daughter relationship as being compassion and being treated like a lady by a man.

And there are other aspects. I mean there's from learning how to take care of your – to take care of mechanical things around the house – how to do – I guess I call them boy things but in case you're ever stuck on your own.

P5: P5 stated, “Instilling that sense that they're worth it – like a sense of self-worth. I think that the father of a girl – that's your first love – you know your first man – your first chance to see – like you love your dad and you see and if your father gives that love back to you, it makes you feel that you're the best thing in the world – no matter what – always given

and then you'll be okay. So, I think if they give them the right love and attention and not be like ridiculing and smothering but you know just giving them that love and attention that acceptance – this is who you are and I accept you and I love you no matter what – you can never do anything wrong in my eyes – I think you're great – that girl will grow up and feel that – that she's great. Probably has a lot to do with self-esteem.

P6: P6 felt that a father should not party with his children. She iterated that:

One of my prayers and requests to God was that one day I would have a relationship with my father and fortunately I did. My dad moved to Florida. He has three daughters. But out of the three daughters two of them partied with my dad. And he was like a friend to them and I just couldn't bring myself to do that. To me a father was somebody who was a protector, who guided, who loved, who told their daughter – sheltered their daughter almost, away from things [that] might hurt her. Protected her. Not necessarily sheltered but protected her. Showed her some good things, but to me doing drugs and drinking with my dad was not what I wanted to do (laughed). So, I never did. But you know interestingly enough amidst all this, I maintained the daughter who was going to be a daughter and what I thought a father daughter relationship would be.... I think we didn't let our dad down. I think we served my dad very well – we all honored him. We did what was right. And I think that the thing that he did that was right was he loved each and every one of us as the unique people that we are and so that was really good later on in life. That I got

that from him. He certainly did let me down as a child but as an adult he was there.

P7: P7 said first would be protection. She says: When I look at my husband and my daughters – he’s definitely their protector and their encourager and I’m the bad guy as far as the parenting goes and he’s definitely The Protector – the one who basically demonstrates a lot of how he how he thinks they should be treated in the world which is intentional in his part, you know, it’s the kind of person that he is. He intentionally wants to show her how men should treat her and I would say that’s my expectation as well sort of like – yeah, I would say the protector and the encourager – provider as well. I think those would be my expectations.

P8: He shows me – I think a father tells me and shows me my femininity of who I am as a woman that’s how I look at it. I feel that a man dictates that to me in his masculinity and how he treats me and he presents me that he shows me my femininity and it helps me to be more feminine as a woman. That’s how I see it and I feel that’s the part you know that I missed is that quality of a man, in his presence, and his demeanor and, how he presents and he behaves with you it teaches you to be more like a lady and a woman you know that’s how I see it – his attributes helping me.

### **How Did You Cope?**

P1 became Mother P1 (her first name). Her family even called her Mother P1. She coped by trying to take care of everyone else – her twin and her younger sibling. In order to cope, she taught herself not to feel. She could even cut herself accidentally and just say, “Ok, whatever.” When she tried to express her feelings, she would be shut up



and her feelings would be disregarded. She felt invisible to everybody in the household and even today at 48, she feels the same way around family.

P2 does not think she coped very well with an absent father. She decided to leave home early because she felt her life was not balanced. Her mother was very busy so she told her that she “wanted to quit school” and she told her “I think if I go to the doctor’s I can get an excuse because I’m going to tell them that I’m going to have a nervous breakdown if I don’t quit school.” The doctor wrote a letter for her to get her out of school. “Back then there was no alternative – so I quit before I was 16 – I quit when I was 15.”

P3 stated, “(ironic laughter) There’s a whole lot of not coping well – a lot more than coping well. I don’t know that I’ve coped well at all.” In the past six months or so she has begun to let herself heal and let herself talk about it. She went to therapy when she was a kid but she did not talk about what happened or what she really needed to talk about. She would just make small talk “about what happened at school that week.... I really never got in to anything that I really should have gotten into.” Now she is in therapy and she guesses that is good. She stated, “I was really promiscuous when I was younger. I experimented with drugs. Drank a lot. Never let myself really feel anything. Sadness – I just blocked it however I could.”

P4 had a close church friend tell her that she “was always that kid that was very hard to get close to. I do keep a wall up around me.” She doesn’t trust people with her feelings. She missed “the dad” stuff like the father/daughter dance. Every time child support order went in, he would quit his job to avoid paying. He never paid anything. She said, “I didn’t have the dad that whenever I started dating to put the fear of God in a

boy to, you know, take care of his girl.” She wanted a dad that would take care of her when she was heartbroken – “as a little girl, first puppy love, what have you – you want to go cry on your daddy’s shoulder.” She felt the father should be a role model. She said, “They are the leader of the family.” She wanted a father that would give direction and be the backbone of the family. He should be there and if “things are going bad” he should pull it together and hold the family together. Fathers should “make everything better. That’s their job.” She said, “If the mother is falling apart crying, the father should step in and make it better.” “He’s got this.” Then her step dad came along and things got better.

P5 stated, “I didn’t cope well because I wrote people off very easily.” She coped well by “not believing that it was my fault.” She did not place blame on herself. She placed the blame on her father. She said, “I think that’s how I coped. I don’t know that it’s coping well but that’s how I got through it.” She said she did not cope well “by being distrusting I guess of men.”

P6 stated, “I tried every drug that there was. I even shot heroin and morphine and meth – at one time.” She stated that she never got hooked on drugs – she felt she was “really searching for love. I was searching for people that could cure this need.” There came a time when she began getting more involved in Church. She said, “A big help for me was finding a salvation through Jesus Christ and it really was a spiritual awakening for me. That was like a pivotal point for my addictions and the way I handled a lot of things.”

P7 stated regarding how she coped well, “It’s hard to say because I don’t know the opposite side and so it’s difficult to say what for me what would have been positive

and then negative because of his absence.” She feels that if she had a father to protect her – to go to and say this person is trying to hurt me – it might have helped her. She said, “As far as coping, I think that the coping was unhealthful ways.”

P8: Well one thing was choosing men cuz I thought when they ... when they move on you – they trying to get all romantic – I thought that was love. I thought – I believed everything that they said. I took it all in and that's a negative because they just trying to relieve the pain they have – you know, they're not interested in me. They don't love me. They don't care but I took it wholeheartedly and would fall in love with them – oh, what do you want? I was all over them, you know, because I believed it and that's because I didn't have a father to teach me that that wasn't the way that it should go. You know? I didn't know it. And it took most of my life and the experiences with men to find out and that's why I was probably abused a lot and misused because they weren't serious about me they was just trying to get a hard-on to get that hard off you know and I was taking as this is my boyfriend. No, he's just trying to relieve himself and that's what I think that I didn't get from my father. If he would have been there I could have learned that piece and saved myself a lot of hardship from that. And then the other side is that I didn't have a father to take care of me financially. We were poor. We were so poor that, you know, I had to fight a rat for a piece of meat. We didn't have a refrigerator in the house. We didn't have that. We lived in the back of people's garages and stuff like that and I remember my auntie brought us some

food because we didn't have no food. It was like on a Thanksgiving or something and she brought a big old turkey or something and a whole lot of sides and we were so happy to get this food but they said we had to go to church first and then when we come back from church we can eat. So, we didn't have a refrigerator to put stuff in so what we did was we wrapped it up really tight in bags and plastic and everything so you know nothing would get into it. And, when we came in and turned on the lights the big ol rats was on the table eating our food. And we – I was crying I was like no, no and I was hitting the rats with a stick and this one rat had a leg. It was a turkey leg and he had that part and me and him was tugging. I was tugging with a rat and mama told me, “No, baby. You can’t eat this cuz the rat bit on it” and I was so hurt and disappointed. We had to throw all the food away. So financially, you know, it hurt me not to have a father because that's how I lived my youth was always in poverty and trying to figure out how I was going to eat – what I was going to eat – didn't have shoes on my feet, you know, things like that – financially, you know, and secure – a secure place that we can lay our heads down on in a house – in a real house – not somebody's garage or basement.

### **Current Status of Your Relationship Journey**

P1 is not in a current relationship. She would like to be but she said it’s scary. She gets anxiety attacks and would rather be alone than deal with that. She said, “I haven’t had a good track record with men, except for one, but he died after 3 years.”

P2 has been married for years and their children are grown. Seven years ago, her husband stepped out on her and when asked why she's still in the relationship, the answer is "our children." She said, "I think although they really want me to be happy as a person, they also really want their mom and dad to be together." Another reason she stays is, "You know – knowing, just knowing that it could change."

P3 stated: There's good and bad and a lot of the bad, I think, has to do with my parents. I don't want to blame them. I'm like in my 30's. I'm my own person. I just realize they haven't really dealt with things. She is very thankful for her partner. He has a hard time sometimes, but for the most part, he is great. I have abandonment issues so I've been really angry my whole life.

P4 stated she quit looking for Mr. Right Now and her current relationship:

Is everything a girl could dream for. It's love. It's compassion. He's a caregiver. We enjoy each other's company. He supports my son in a great way and he's a good role model.

P5 has been married almost 20 years. She stated that:

There is no intimacy. There was at the beginning – the first half of the marriage. After the kids came, no – just kind of went away – that feeling and now we're just kind of existing. you know, in the same house. It's kind of sad.

P6 replied: I am not. My last relationship was when my 27-year-old daughter was – we broke up when she was 3 and that was a boyfriend who was an alcoholic and I told him at the very bad time of his life, because his mother was dying, that if he didn't stop drinking I wasn't going to be available for him. And so, he said he would choose drinking over me. It was very hurtful.... I don't have

one now and I don't see any one – any in the future and I would say it was because I don't know how to have one.

P7: I mean I think it's fine that - I think as far as our relationship, it's really centered around our kids more than around the two of us and so kind of a hard question to answer, I think. I mean it's a healthy relationship.

Later she stated: I'm not sure honestly because I think there's other things like I feel unhappy in my current relationship and all these areas with room for improvement and I'm not sure that it's an improvement with not really knowing what I want or can expect and feeling that I should have that umm I'm not even sure myself on what those expectations are and so I'm not sure. I don't know exactly why I am where I am right now.

P8: When asked about being in a current relationship replied:

Yes, with myself. I just came out that relationship the first of the year and I've been by myself in my home and you know just thanking God for being alive.

Yeah. That's where I'm at now and I'm comfortable with this. I'm enjoying it really.

### **Therapeutic Interventions**

P1 did attend therapy.

P2 stated that she has “been to counseling. In fact, tomorrow I have an appointment.”

P5 stated: My therapist also told me that I was going to have a really hard time maintaining relationships. I was going to have a really hard time being married because I wouldn't, you know – I'm always thinking something's going to go, you

know, I mean it's that level of trust is gone. I mean and when you're a little girl your father is like the first man in your life. The first relation where you have that person – that male figure – that role model and then when they just take up and go – what are you supposed to think? You know? Is that how they all are?

Her therapist said that she (P5) felt that “people are replaceable” because she had been left so many times. “I didn't have that solid ground.”

P6 stated, “I've spent so much money in counseling.” She credits one particular counselor with helping restore her self-esteem after her breakup with an abusive man. “Therapy was a positive thing.” “He was so, so good. He helped me so, so well. So, therapy was a positive thing.”

### **Expectations in an Intimate Romantic Relationship (what she needs now)**

P1 stated, “I think that I am needy. When things are good, I want a lot of attention and affection.”

P2 stated that despite her husband of 40 years' infidelity:

My expectations were, you know, like a monogamous relationship – where one person falls in love with another and I think I still live with this like fantasy in my mind like just like it's supposed to be always not always but you know very beautiful and creative and all that good stuff.

P3 stated, “Well, I don't know how many expectations I have. I have wants.” She wants “honesty and loyalty and intimacy.”

P4 desires him to be “kind, compassionate, be there, be involved, be a role model.”

P5 describes her expectations as wanting her partner:

To be honest, loyal, to show affection. A loving relationship should be unconditional and you should lift somebody up and you should be better together as two but not to the point where you're infused. I think that everybody deserves their own space. Being proactive with the relationship.

P6 explains, "My expectations would definitely be somebody I could trust if – if I can trust anybody." "Somebody that would be patient and willing to stick it out."

P7 said: So I think as far as expectations "fidelity" is definitely number one. As far as intimate relationship also I think stability - definitely like you know, knowing exactly what's going on and you know not a lot of drama and things like that and enjoying each other as far as just really liking each other. My husband and I we like each other. We like to talk to each other. We like to laugh with each other and so I think far as expectations right now off the top of my head those are the things that I would say just sort of like fidelity, stability, and a sense of maybe camaraderie if I were to put words on it.

P8 admonished that her:

Expectation is that I need to continue to be where I'm at. I don't need to cater to the man because when I was with my husbands, I always catered to them. I'm always subservient to them and whatever they ask me to do, I would do it. I cooked food from scratch. I'd make bread. I'm a good cook so I make everything from scratch – rolls, dinner rolls, cook dinner, and breakfast, lunch, and dinner and fixed his plate – did everything. I was like that – did everything I catered to the man, did everything for them and neglected myself in that process. And uh so now it's like the man that I have, if I was to receive a man now, he would have to



be totally independent. He'd have to be able to stand on his own two feet and not want me to cater to him. I'm just saying he would need to assist me to help me with what I'm doing because all my life I've helped everybody else. I raised my sister's girls. I helped my mother. I was begging for my father's attention. I was always – it's always about everybody else but me and now I'm selfish. I'm focused on me and what my needs are. And the man of my life is going to need to do that as well. He's going to have to be able to cater to me for a change. I know that might sound selfish but for me it's not. I don't feel that I'm selfish when I require that from a man.

### **Expectations of Yourself in an Intimate Romantic Relationship**

P1 stated: I would want to give [the person] the respect and consideration he deserves but sometimes I feel like I'm closing up and I can't even. Sometimes I want to be mean to them [and] ...sometimes it's like I see that they're upset or something and then instead of comforting them, I will block myself off from even doing that... I close myself up because I feel like if I open up then I'll be vulnerable.

P2 stated: I feel as if a healthy relationship means lots of different things. It means you know as far as intimacy goes it means having you know time where you talk about your interests, you're supported, you feel secure, you feel safe, you feel loved, and you take time out – it's not just one sided – it's two people who care about each other and so with that said then you make time for one another you do fun things that creates some of those opportunities of um renewing and newness so that's what my expectations are. The whole ball of worms.

P3 expects honesty and loyalty from herself towards her partner.

P4 works to be: Compassionate and caring toward my husband and to treat him and his kids as much as I can possibly the way he treats me and mine and to grow together – grow old together. Yeah, I want to be sitting on rockers watching the sunset on a porch.

P5 stated: Just kind of go with the flow you know. Not try to put a time line on things – to just kind of let things happen as they happen [and] appreciate you know what they do instead of focusing on what they don't do... and try to see the person in that right...because maybe that would help.

P6 stated her expectations of herself are, “To share. To laugh. To love. To do things that we both enjoy. To grow old together. Yeah, that’s what I would like.”

P7 stated: I think [hmm] that's tough because I think like I could in my mind I – say well my expectations will be that I will be open and honest and direct but I think it –my actions – I'm not if I'm being perfectly honest there's always this sense of how vulnerable do I want to be and so it always takes – and so I think that underneath my expectation is that I'll be open and honest but still preserve a little bit and guarded a little bit just in case the bottom falls out that I won't fall with it and so there's this boundary thing for me between okay I'm married and so my husband knows everything about me and so I shouldn't be embarrassed about anything but at the same time it's just sort of like well so don't be a dummy just in case something happens you know and I be caught off guard by anything and so you know you have your plan B somewhere in case you ever need it and that might be for everyone – I'm not sure but that's definitely there. So as far as my

expectations on myself would be to – to be both open and honest and also a little a little guarded to be safe.

P8 stated: My expectation right now is that I'm not really looking for someone. I'm not looking for a man. I'm not out there. When I see men now I just kind of greet them on a brotherly level but I'm not looking at them trying to be romantic with any of them. The only thing that I kind of missed is that I when I do these speaking engagements and conferences and things like that and sometimes they're formal – my thinking because I come from that generation – you need to be escorted by man to the event. That's the only part that I would like to resolve is that when I go to these events where it would be good to have an escort of a male that's where I'm like I wish I could have a male that would do that for me. I was thinking well I have men friends and I'll ask them if they could escort me when I have to go to one of these meetings so that's the only shortfall I'm feeling right now. I'm not into [the] romantic piece - in my head I'm not trying to get a romance. I'm not trying to get you to go to bed with me. That's not where I'm at.

### **Psychosocial Stages Correlating to Age of Abandonment**

There are eight psychosocial stages in Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. The eight women interviewed in this study fall in one of five stages: Stage 1: trust versus mistrust, Stage 2: autonomy versus shame, Stage 3: initiative versus guilt, Stage 4: industry versus inferiority, and Stage 5: identity versus role confusion. Each participants stage at time of abandonment is listed below with their corresponding participant number. The definition of the stage is also presented.

Table 4

*Age of Abandonment*

Participant	Age at time of abandonment	Psychosocial Stage
P1	About 13 years old	Identity vs. Role Confusion
P2	9 years old	Industry vs. Inferiority
P3	18 months old	Trust vs. Mistrust
P4	Less than 2 years old	Autonomy vs. Shame
P5	5 years old	Initiative vs. Guilt / Industry vs. Inferiority
P6	9 years old	Industry vs. Inferiority
P7	5 or 6 months old	Trust vs. Mistrust
P8	2 years old	Autonomy vs. Shame

As described in Chapter 1, Erikson's Psychosocial Stages correlate to the age of the child. Table 4 indicates the psychosocial stages of the adult daughters in this study and at what stage they were abandoned by their father.

**Participant 1 (P1):**

P1 was abandoned by her father at the age of 13. This stage is identity versus role confusion which is said to occur between the ages of 12 and 18. The basic virtue in this stage is fidelity – the ability to commit to relationships with others and form good friendship bonds. She said, “I thought it was natural and normal in my world to be abused or neglected or you know yelled at or belittled.” “I started counseling and I started realizing that I had no male role model.” Four years ago, she went back to counseling.

Yeah, got to know who I was and that I didn't need to deal with the bullcrap and at the same time still attracting these yucky men and I think part of it is because

I'm scared to get close to people so I'm attracted to these yucky people.... I can't open up emotionally to other people so I think I attract people that are emotionally unavailable to me.

Regarding the possibility of having a relationship today, "I can't do it right now. I just feel too vulnerable."

**Participant 2 (P2):**

P2 was abandoned by her father at 9. This stage is the industry versus inferiority stage. In the industry versus inferiority stage, the child learns to be productive. Industry in this case means competence. During this stage, her peer group influences her self-esteem. P1 quit school at 14. She asked to go see a doctor.

I told them that I could not do it anymore. I said you know I'm around all these people – these kids who are mean.... And by the time I was 14 all my friends were at least 10 years older than me. I said, I think if I go to the doctors I can get an excuse because I'm going to tell them that I'm going to have a nervous breakdown if I don't quit school. So, he wrote a letter – she took me to the doctor's and he wrote a letter to get me out of school and back then there was no alternatives.... I did not belong in middle school.... I felt totally out of place there. I mean, I could not – I mean I related to people but just – no I could not relate to middle school.... To the goings on, the bullying, what they thought was important, etc.

She went alone to Miami and then to New York where she worked various places including a prestigious art gallery.

**Participant 3 (P3):**

P3 was abandoned by her father at 18 months old. This age is on the cusp between the end of the trust versus mistrust stage and the beginning of autonomy versus shame. In the trust versus mistrust stage the child learns to have trust and confidence in the reliability and sameness of their care providers. The basic virtue in this stage is hope. In the autonomy versus shame stage, the child is learning to be autonomous but shame and doubt can turn into being self-conscious and the wish to be invisible. The right balance at this stage helps develop independence and good self-esteem and diminishes shame and self-doubt. If the father is absent, she may mistrust male figures and lack attachment to a male figure. The basic virtue in this state is will.

I never really wanted a relationship. I never [my] entire adult life – I didn't want to get married. I didn't want kids. When I was a kid, I didn't like displays of affection. When my mom got remarried, I was really uncomfortable with, you know, them holding hands or kissing. I had never – I had never really seen that role modeled before. Yeah, I don't trust people. I have a really hard time with trust.... I'm very sensitive to being neglected. When I was growing up, I really just wanted to have this hard shell – hard exterior – where nobody knew how hurt I was and up until a couple years ago I didn't really let myself feel.

Yeah you know he said you know sometimes life sucks. That's one of the things he tells me after my husband died...sometimes life sucks. (laughing) I'm like – really. You were the first person to teach me that. I'm pretty aware that life sucks (laughs) I grew up without a dad – I'm pretty ... I'm pretty aware that life sucks. And another time – I have three pets and I didn't know where I was going to go or what I was going to do and um you know he told me well it's easier to

just get rid of them and just go on by yourself. (laughing) I'm just sitting in shock like I can't even believe you'd say that ... ugh ... I mean that's how he feels obviously.

**Participant 4 (P4):**

P4 was abandoned by her father at around 2 years old. This stage is the autonomy versus shame and doubt stage. In the autonomy versus shame and doubt stage a child establishes themselves with ways of experiencing (introspection on their feelings), ways of behavior (as seen by others), and own unconscious mind. The child is learning to be autonomous but shame and doubt can turn into being self-conscious and the wish to be invisible. The right balance at this stage helps develop independence and good self-esteem, and diminishes shame and self-doubt. The basic virtue in this state is will.

The one thing my mom always raised me and it was good or bad, you know, never depend on a man to do something for you that you can't do yourself. And you know, that was a hard. I'm very independent being raised by a single mom; but, there's good and bad to that. Sometimes in a relationship you can be too independent. My ex-husband told me that – that I didn't need him because I could take care – such good care of myself.

**Participant 5 (P5):**

P5 was abandoned by her father at 5. P5 falls at the border of initiative versus guilt and shame and industry versus inferiority: In the initiative versus guilt stage children are becoming more themselves in judgment and ingenuity. The basic virtue in this stage is purpose. In the industry versus inferiority stage, the child learns to be industrious. Her peer group influences her self-esteem. The basic virtue in this stage is

competency. This is also a stage of many questions in an attempt to take the initiative to understand the world around them.

I always thought men were just a horrible species. When I was growing up, I used to like be real flirtatious with guys you know and I used to use like my femininity to kind of get what I wanted. I would let them wine and dine me and I had boyfriends. They never lasted. The relationships never lasted and I was okay. Whereas my other girlfriends would cry and this guy left them and I would be like oh there's other fish in the sea just move on. I wonder if that comes back to my father because I never let that bother me. I was like oh you know that's his problem. It's not your problem. It's him. You didn't do anything wrong. I used to say to my girlfriends – let him be somebody else's problem. You just move on and get another guy. My therapist said to me that I was – to me everybody was – people are replaceable – because I have been left so many times. You know. You know, I didn't have that solid ground.

**Participant 6 (P6):**

P6 was abandoned by her father at the age of 9. This stage is the industry versus inferiority stage. In the industry versus inferiority stage, the child learns to be productive. Industry in this case means competence. Her peer group influences her self-esteem. The basic virtue in this stage is competency. The school-age child may let others threaten the sense of identity trying to be established. If the father abandons the daughter during this stage she may lack encouragement and reinforcement and fail to build competency and doubt her potential and abilities.



So, at a very young age I sought out the attentions of men, gave of my body freely for [the] searching of love – wanting to be loved. And, I also started doing drugs and alcohol. I would say that I did every drug there was and probably marijuana was my biggest drug and in that whole stint I ran away from home. I managed to graduate from high school and still managed to have a dream that I would someday become a nurse.

**Participant 7 (P7):**

P7 was abandoned by her father at 5 or 6 months old. This stage is the trust versus mistrust stage. In the trust versus mistrust stage, the child learns to have trust and confidence in the reliability and sameness of their care providers. The basic virtue in this stage is hope. When the baby daughter knows she can trust her father, she has hope that she is safe and protected in a world of consistent caring. If the father is absent, she may mistrust male figures and lack attachment to a male figure.

I'll be open and honest but still preserve a little bit and guarded a little bit just in case the bottom falls out that I won't fall with it. And, so there's this boundary thing for me between okay? I'm married and so my husband knows everything about me and so I shouldn't be embarrassed about anything; but, at the same time it's just sort of like well so don't be a dummy just in case something happens you know and I be caught off guard by anything and so you know you have your plan B somewhere in case you ever need it and that might be for everyone I'm not sure but that's definitely there. So as far as my expectations on myself would be to – to be both open and honest and also a little a little guarded to be safe.

### **Participant 8 (P8):**

P8 was abandoned by her father at around 2 years old. This stage is the autonomy versus shame and doubt stage. In the autonomy versus shame and doubt the child is learning to be autonomous but shame and doubt can turn into being self-conscious and the wish to be invisible. In this stage the balance between self-control and healthy self-esteem is desired. If the father abandons the daughter in this stage, shame may replace autonomy. She said, “So, I grew up with this inferiority complex because my father didn't receive me properly, I felt that something was wrong with me and I wasn't good enough.”

As clinicians by realizing the age at which they were abandoned and the correlating stage the girl was in when she was abandoned, we can see the behaviors that correlate to that time frame of her life and work on those issues to help her grow to the next level and beyond.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Guba (1981) addressed the needed constructs to establish trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Miles and Huberman (1994) expanded on these constructs. These constructs include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility will answer the question, “Are the findings congruent with reality?” (Merriam, 1998; Shento 2004). Credibility was ensured by having participants complete the screening questionnaire, digitally recording the interviews, taking notes during the interview, transcribing the interview verbatim, and meticulous attention to detail in presenting the findings. Participants were genuinely excited to participate and tell their stories (Guba, 1981). Trustworthiness was established and the interview data valid to be

utilized in other studies. Dependability was established as the data was elicited directly from participants in this study. Other researchers can use these same questions to replicate the findings. Lastly, confirmability was established in the data collected. These attributes confirm the practical integrity of this study. This repetitive process and analysis of each participant's interview along with the member checking as needed allows the achievement of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981). The design of the study along with the meticulous execution of the study confirm trustworthiness.

### **Summary**

The eight participants in this study were willing to describe in detail being abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and everything in between. They are lovely, hardworking, intelligent, amazing women. They are mothers and sisters and community leaders. They are mental health care providers, nurses, and stay at home moms. They are important and their lives are meaningful. Literature has focused on the symptoms of daughters abandoned by their fathers. This focus on symptomatology views father abandonment from the perspective of symptoms suffered by the abandoned daughters (Jensen et al, 1997; La Guardia et al., 2014; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Comings et al., 2002; Luo et al., 2012; Quigley, 2003; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Haywood, 1995; La Guardia et al., 2014; Hendricks et al., 2005; Comings et al., 2002). It has been noted that lacking a father figure makes adult women more susceptible to poor self-esteem (Luo et al., 2012), accidental pregnancy (Quigley, 2003), unfulfilled educational potential (Krohn & Bogan, 2001), poverty (Haywood, 1995), developmental deficits (La Guardia et al., 2014) promiscuity (Hendricks et al., 2005), and even divorce (Comings et al., 2002). Using

these symptoms as a starting point, this qualitative study examined where daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships. Daughters socially construct their worldview through the interchanges and interactions of their childhood. With this information, mental health professionals can work to understand their daughter clients who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and how they develop and engage in their relationships and why. By examining these stories of abandoned women and their experiences, they can better understand and facilitate therapeutic interventions. A missing father is impactful on a girl's and a woman's life.

Individual semi-structured interviews helped each woman to tell 'her' story. Some looked for love in all the wrong places. Other closed themselves off and did not allow themselves to feel. But in the end, they are stories of hope. They are powerful. They are what real women go through on their journey of life.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

Scholars in the field of psychology and the social sciences continue to write about the symptomatology of children who are abandoned by their fathers. Yet, little or no research has been conducted on the value of mental healthcare professionals, therapists, counselors, and pastors asking female clients who are struggling in their current intimate romantic relationships about the presence or absence of their fathers or a father figure in their lives growing up. This study was purposefully completed in order to explore the effect of father abandonment on daughters prior to the age of 18. The researcher was struck by differences in terms of the effect of abandonment depending on the age of the daughter at the time of the abandonment. The age of the daughter can be correlated to a psychosocial stage and correlating effects may be examined. This carries on into where she is today in her intimate romantic relationship and how she develops and engages in the relationship. Furthermore, this study caused the researcher to realize that delving into paternal presences in the childhoods of a female clients with relationship issues could assist in facilitating therapeutic understanding and promote healing. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and how they develop and engage in these relationships. The conceptual framework for this qualitative study consisted of social constructionism and Erikson's psychosocial stages. This study focused on the lived experiences of abandoned daughters from the daughters' own perspectives. Ten themes emerged after data collection, transcription, and analysis of recorded interviews with each participant.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature regarding daughter abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 was conducted. While symptomatology was widely studied and reported, no studies could be found on abandoned daughters and where they are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships as adult women. Daughters seemingly tend to internalize abandonment and wonder what they did to cause their father to not want to be in their lives. Implications lie in finding out where abandoned daughters are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships and addressing issues that correlate to this abandonment in order to bring understanding, therapeutic treatment options, and facilitate positive social change – to help in the treatment of abandoned daughters and the fathers considering not being in their daughter’s lives.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In Chapter 2, the rationale for this study was addressed. A search of the literature revealed no qualitative studies that specifically examined where women who were abandoned by their father prior to the age of 18 are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships. By comparing this study to those of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the difference is that Chapter 2 presented symptomologies that were experienced and this study asks specific questions regarding how old the woman was as a young girl when she was abandoned by her father and where she is in her current intimate romantic relationship. This study used open-ended interview questions to allow those who were abandoned to ‘tell their story’ – how did they get through it – where are they today?

In this study many of the challenges uncovered in the literature review in Chapter 2 were reiterated. Participants seemed more susceptible to poor self-esteem (Luo et al.,

2012), poverty (Haywood, 1995), developmental deficits (La Guardia et al., 2014), promiscuity (Hendricks et al., 2005), and unstable relationships and divorce (Comings et al., 2002). Participants in this study however did not mention any accidental pregnancies (Quigley, 2003), or unfulfilled educational potential (Krohn & Bogan, 2001).

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with prepared open-ended questions as well as plenty of time allotted for participants to tell their personal stories. The interviews were digitally recorded to allow the researcher to listen to them multiple times for clarification and analysis. The digital recordings were transcribed verbatim. Some follow-up telephonic interviews were conducted with the same participants for member checking purposes. Some participants also sent an email regarding things they wanted to add and/or clarify. Data were analyzed for multiple codes and themes. Each participant's perspective was reported while respecting their anonymity and privacy. Seven themes and three sub themes emerged from the interviews of the eight women which supplied the data to answer the two research questions:

*RQ1:* How does a daughter being abandoned by her father prior to the age of 18 relate to where she is today in her adult intimate romantic relationships?

*RQ2:* What meanings do participants attach to relationships and relationship satisfaction as a result of their childhood experiences?

### **Research Question 1**

*How does a daughter being abandoned by her father prior to the age of 18 relate to where she is today in her adult intimate romantic relationships?*

The participants' responses varied based on what age they were abandoned and subsequent relationship and life experiences. The fact that a participant was a mental

health care practitioner and knew the answers they would give a client, did not change their own viewpoint of what they personally were equipped to do.

### **Current Relationship**

P1 is not currently in an intimate romantic relationship. She would like to be but she feels it is scary. She gets anxiety attacks and “would rather be alone than deal with that.” She has not “had a good track record with men, except for one, but he died after 3 years of marriage” – unexpectedly.

Yeah, but what do I tell my clients? Develop relationships, go hang out, meet people at hobbies, go ahead, you know... Not me... I'm like NO WAY!

(laughing). I'm not getting involved with anybody ever again. I'm never talking to anybody ever again. I tell them [her clients] the opposite but I don't want a relationship. I feel like that's a waste of time for me.... but I feel like for them if they want a relationship, we could fix it. We could work it out so they could have a healthy one... and then I'm like “Oh, I guess I could too.” CAN'T. I and then I'm thinking NOPE... I'm not doing it... no way, no freaking way! I couldn't!

Are you kidding me?

She has a hard time getting close. To her, she would rather be alone. She has some friends she hangs out with but they know that she needs space so “it's not like I see them every week. It scares me to get involved with people closely.” Regarding the possibility of having a relationship today, “I can't do it right now. I just feel too vulnerable.”

P2 has been married for 40 years and their children are grown. They have had a great life, great kids, sufficient money, nice house, etc. Seven years ago, unbeknownst to her, her husband stepped out on her and she did not find out until fairly recently and



when asked why she's still in the relationship, the answer is "our children."

She said, "I think although they really want me to be happy as a person, they also really want their mom and dad to be together..." and also "You know...knowing, just knowing that it could change."

P3 stated she is "in therapy now" and she's "very thankful for [her] partner. He has a hard time sometimes but for the most part he is great." She stated that she has abandonment issues. She also said, "So, I've been really angry my whole life." She stated that her partner, "He's so sensitive to that (her crying). I'm really trying to be more vocal and he's supportive of that." He gets her to talk even when she doesn't want to and she says, "which is good."

P4 stated she has been married 3 years. She describes her current relationship as: Everything a girl could dream for. It's love. It's compassion. He's a caregiver. We enjoy each other's company. He supports my son in a great way and he's a good role model. He's great. I've been very blessed by him and he loves me and adores me and loves and adores my son and supports us as far as any decision making ... and with my son going in to the Army I mean he was right there with him getting sworn in.

P5 has been married almost 20 years. There is no intimacy. There was at the beginning – the first half of the marriage. After the kids came, no – just kind of went away – that feeling and now we're just kind of existing. you know, in the same house. It's kind of sad. He told me he loved me. He wants us to get back to where we were.... He is an awesome father.... Because my children love him, I could never take my kids from him. I could never do that. I could never upset

their lives. And then you know what I'm thinking that maybe it's because my life was upset when my father left, you know? To make that connection. And that's the struggle that I have so..."

P6: I am not. My last relationship was when my 27-year-old daughter was – we broke up when she was 3 and that was a boyfriend who was an alcoholic and I told him at the very bad time of his life, because his mother was dying, that if he didn't stop drinking I wasn't going to be available for him. And so, he said he would choose drinking over me. It was very hurtful.... I don't have one now and I don't see any one – any in the future and I would say it was because I don't know how to have one.

She has custody of her 4 grandchildren. "I am where I'm supposed to be right now. They needed my help. If I had a man, I would probably not be ... I would had to have said no to these kids."

P7 has been married 5 1/2 years. When describing her current relationship:

I mean I think it's fine that – I think as far as our relationship, it's really centered around our kids more than around the two of us and so kind of a hard question to answer I think. I mean it's a healthy relationship. I'm not sure honestly because I think there's other things like I feel unhappy in my current relationship and all these areas with room for improvement and I'm not sure that it's an improvement with not really knowing what I want or can expect and feeling that I should have that umm I'm not even sure myself on what those expectations are and so I'm not sure ... I don't know exactly why I am where I am right now.

P8: Yes, with myself. I just came out of that relationship the first of the year and I've been by myself in my home and you know just thanking God for being alive. Yeah. That's where I'm at now and I'm comfortable with this. I'm enjoying it really.

## **Research Question 2**

*What meanings do participants attach to relationships and relationship satisfaction as a result of their childhood experiences?*

### **Childhood Experiences**

All of the participants are adult daughters who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of eighteen. P1 was 13 when her father left. She stated:

I never knew what a real healthy marriage was like from a male perspective. I think that impacted my perspective on relationships as an adult.... I think that I am needy. When things are good, I want a lot of attention and affection. When this are stressful or we are arguing, I tend to pull into myself and avoid confrontation. This is not to say I don't argue or fight sometimes. Even when things are going well, I feel myself pulling away from my partner sometimes too. I think this is a learned behavior from both my parents; staying with a man that does not treat me well was learned by my mother and not knowing what a good male partner looks like because my father was not a good example and/or role model.... In other words, I close up big time.

P2 was abandoned by her father at the age of 9 and she put her whole heart and soul into her marriage. She stated:

Your study is interesting. I think if anything, if people don't want to participate it's because it's kind of painful to, you know, be honest and truthful about your experiences. Yeah. Like it's a reality and it will help maybe other people understand the reality or what happens when there's not a father in your life and how it affects your life from that moment on. I never wanted to get married. Never. I mean because I just – and I never wanted to have children and here I am with 4 children – right [and] married. But I can say, you know, I can say that I definitely – my commitment was strong; but, you know, you can't control other people and when you got that factor of human, you know, “Hu-man” – you’ve got a huge variability on behavior and consciousness and spirituality and depth of the soul. Seven years ago, this is what happened to me. My husband decided to go outside of the marriage; but it was a real surprise to me because I'm a really like hard worker. I'm very independent. I take. When things don't get done, I take. You know, I was kind of living a super mother life – like super mom with super kids and super this and super that and then that night he never came home. Then he came home and it – just everything fell apart. So since then it's been horrible. I thought that everything would be back to normal by now but it's not. I don't even know what kind of relationship it is but I don't like it. It sounds horrible. He and I have been to counseling. They tell us what to do and I'm so ready and willing. I think I've read 100 books on the subject. I've tried to figure him out as a person and I haven't been able to do that either – because he fits every one of the books (laughing) – the loveless marriage, passive aggression, and it just goes on and on and on and on. I really thought that we could probably get our relationship

back. Well I know you can do anything you want to do but when you only have one person that's thinking like that and the other person – I think just wants to treat you like an old pair of jeans, you know, he says he loves them but there still holey and comfortable (laughing). I mean seriously and so like I said nothing has worked. He's not wanted to do anything. He doesn't like to do anything. He lied to me about his affair for 5 years. I mean every time he lied you know I thought everything was fine. Then I'd – things weren't – the pieces of the puzzle weren't fitting together and something new would come up. So, 5 of the 7 years were figuring out the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In along with those truths some other things started popping up in my head like the thing that happened in Atlanta, Georgia when my best friend came one day crying to me and saying I can't do this. I can't keep this a secret. I need to talk to you and she told me my husband was having an affair in Georgia.... He was just fooling around with the girl from the strip club. So, have we been able to piece anything back? No. No, it just got worse. I just have to you know ask for prayers from everybody especially me to God because we have you know our children. Of course, it's kind of weird with children too because they've never seen their mom –to my children because I literally did most everything. I raised them. He was here but I took them everywhere. Got them everything. I did everything. Worked extra jobs to pay for horseback riding, traveling, all kinds of stuff.... I would have never guessed in all my life that this that this would have ever happened.

P3 was 18 months old when her father left. She stated (speaking about her current relationship):

It's hard. It's very hard. We're both kind of realizing how much our upbringings have affected us and any time we kind of have problems it's usually coming back to something that happened in our childhood. I'm very sensitive to feeling neglected. So anytime I feel like I'm being ignored or neglected, I'm very, very sensitive. But my relationship is okay. I never really let myself feel when I was growing up. I really just wanted to have this hard shell – hard exterior where nobody knew how hurt I was and up until a couple years ago I didn't really let myself feel. I have OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) and it got really bad a couple of years ago. Really, really, bad and I started taking medication and I started letting myself feel my feelings as they come to me and it's been really hard and it's a little overwhelming for my boyfriend now because he feels like I'm just always crying all the time and sometimes I feel like I am always crying all the time. I do cry a lot but it's good I let myself cry for a change. [I'm] acting differently than I have my whole life. I tend to not want to talk about what I'm feeling so this time in my relationship now I'm making more of an effort to discuss when something is bothering me because I realize that he doesn't know and often he thinks that it's something he did and it's not really. He does something that kind of triggers me and then I'm crying for an hour. I'm really trying to be more vocal and he's supportive of that. He kind of makes me talk when I don't want to which is good.

P4 was less than 2 years old when her father left. She stated: I have a brother that is 47 and matter of fact I know my brother has recently reached out and talked to [my dad] on Facebook because he has – he's crippled with MS

[Multiple Sclerosis] and he was trying to get his medical history and from him and he [the father] never once asked about me – never once asked, you know, please have your sister contact me – nothing. Yeah, it blows my mind being a parent. It just – I can't fathom that and I knew when I divorced I would never marry a man that didn't accept my son. I know that you'll never be able to love someone that's not truly your child the way you would love your child but you can still love them and care for them and you are as close as possible. And, I found him (a husband that would love her son).

P5 was 5 years old when her father left. She stated:

From my perspective I think you know that there was some things that I expected from him that he didn't do like help me out with the kids. There was a lot of resentment but then from his perspective he says to me I was abusive to him, that I made him feel that he was never good enough and that that hurt our relationship. So, then he stopped being you know loving because of the person that I became with him. And, you know, he said I put him down a lot and stuff and it's possible – I don't remember to be truthful. I don't know if that's what I did but I think there was resentment on both of our sides. I think that I had certain expectations that I felt that he wasn't really around a lot it was always like all the responsibilities were dumped on me. I think to be truthful, growing up and seeing my mom struggle – I don't think I wanted to be that person – to be like that domestic person. I was always one to work and get my – I have two master's degrees and working on my doctorate. I was always wanting to go to school. Wanting to better myself in that regard. And, I love my children – took care of my kids but I

didn't want to do things like cook and clean. I didn't want to be home with the kids. I wanted to always do something more. My husband he grew up with a mother that stayed home she was like very – does everything for the kids. But I feel that it's too much. So, we had – we did not agree on parenting. We had different ideas I think – what could you say roles maybe? Husband and wife roles that was a disagreement. But we wouldn't really openly talk about it you know it would just kind of we would just not talk about it at all – like the dissatisfaction. We'd just isolate ourselves from each other and stuff. And, then once you stop talking, stop communicating, you just kind of go through the motions. I thought that maybe I can, you know, file for divorce.... You know, because I don't want to take – because here's the thing, he's an awesome father but he's not to me the husband – my relationship isn't there.... I couldn't understand why I stayed so long without having (goes quiet). You know my friends that are married and have intimacy with their husbands and have this loving relationship they – they don't understand. They're like – how can you be there? How can you just live that life like that? And I go because my children love him and I could never take my kids from him. I could never do that. I could never upset their lives. And, then you know what I'm thinking – that maybe it's because my life was upset when my father left – you know? To make that connection. And that's the struggle that I have.

P6 was about 9 years old when her father left. She states that she:



Sought out the attentions of men and gave of her body freely in the search for love and wanting to be loved at the age of 14. I've had three marriages and they all failed.

All the – I'm so wonderful until you marry me and then I'm not.

So, anyway, here I am – my last relationship was with, you know, the man who is a businessman – well-oiled so to speak and great connections that I broke up with because he thought more of his alcohol than he did of me and that was my last relationship. I have been single since then. It's lonely.

Since let me see here since 1994.

I have custody of four kids - grandkids.

I'm right where I'm supposed to be. I'm raising four grandkids. They needed my help. Because that's ... I am where I'm supposed to be right now. Because I really believe that there aren't too many men that would accept 4 kids ... very few men you know from what I know of men there's very few who would have the patience for 4 grandchildren and being this dedicated with all the problems that they've had. I honestly don't think ... you know that if I had a man I would probably not be I probably would have had to have said no to these kids.

P7 was 5 or 6 months old when her father left so there was never a relationship with him. She stated:

As far as my marriage right now, I think it just has a lot to do with... I think I settled into it in a healthier way – as far as growing a little bit more in the area of knowing what I want and deserve and also ... when I met my husband it wasn't this desire or need.... I was already a very established teacher. My life was fine.

I was traveling the world by myself and I wasn't really like oh my goodness I need a relationship – I'm getting older kind of feeling at all. And so, I think entering our marriage with the idea of – I know it's cliché – but this person enhances my life. They don't complete me. And so, he doesn't complete me. We both kind of stand on our own two feet and we just sort of decided to come together.

She still has her doubts at times.

I think there's other things like I feel unhappy in my current relationship and all these areas with room for improvement and I'm not sure that it's an improvement with not really knowing what I want or can expect and feeling that I should have that umm I'm not even sure myself on what those expectations are and so I'm not sure.

P8 was 2 years old when her father left. The relationship that she has relationship that she struggles with now is food. She stated:

That's how it (not having a father provided) impacted me and that has impacted me to this day right now with food. I know I have a food issue. And the food issue is that right now in my house I have a deep freezer in the garage that's full to the top with food. I have a refrigerator in the kitchen that's full freezer and the refrigerator right now full with food – cupboards are filled with food. I have a rack out in the garage with food on it. I don't want the food. I'm not hungry but I need and I'll go to the store and buy stuff and I'll be like I don't need to buy this. I already got this, already got that. I'm always that little girl worried about am I going to have food to eat tomorrow? So that's the part I'm dealing with right now

with me, you know, it's not to go out and keep buying food and putting more food in that freezer – throw more stuff in the cupboards – but it all comes from that. It all stems from that. So, I'm working on me – that's a part of me that I'm working on right now – is to not you know keep buying food and keep living in the past in my head when it comes to food.

**He Chose His Other Family.** Several participants expressed frustration of not only being abandoned by their fathers but there being other children from different relationships not abandoned. Some would internalize this and believe it must be about them and that they were somehow less lovable. Regardless it feels like a wound that will not and cannot heal.

P1 revealed that her mother married her father at the age of 19 and he was an abusive alcoholic. Her father cheated on her mother with P1's godmother. In her words she described it as being like an episode of Jerry Springer. Her father married “that woman” and had three more kids. “I can tell you from my experience as a child, I have no idea how to have a healthy relationship. None. None.” She believes she is missing the male perspective “I never knew what a real healthy marriage was looking like from a male perspective...I think that impacted my perspective on relationships as an adult.” He left. Abandoned us...to be with his other family.

P2's father was a Mensa member. She said he wrote beautiful Haiku. After his death she found a list her father had made and kept of all the women her father had been with while in the military in Japan.

P3 stated that she has “3 stepsisters, a half-sister, and a half-brother on my dad's side and from everything that they've said in my adult life it pretty much sounds like I

was better off without him but that doesn't undo all the (laughing) years of childhood that I didn't feel that way." "You know I would have rather had a present shitty dad than a nonexistent dad."

P4 has a half-sister that found her and they reconnected. P4 stated:

You know I always thought she was the lucky one...the one that he wanted and wanted to have something to do with in life and never could figure out why he didn't want see me or what did I do to piss him off and whenever you know we finally met up and talked ... she goes I thought you were the lucky one because you got away from him ... he had her on drugs by the time she was 12 years old. By the time she was 13 she had a needle in her arm.

P5's father did not have another family.

P6 did not mention any other family or affairs.

P7 has no idea where her father is or even if he's alive. She stated:

I remembered three or four years where I had this inclination that you know that technology is out there I should probably find him. And I remember my grandfather getting really stern with me once and he said no it's not your responsibility to find him, he needs to find you and that was the end of the story.

P8 my father's mother: influenced my father to not have any relationship with my mother at that point in time. So, when I was born, he didn't deny me and say I wasn't his child. He knew I was his child and what they did was they made sure they made those payments to her to take care of me every month but she said she received the money to take care of me but there was no relationship with me and them or her and them. So, her dad chose his birth family over his family.

**Dad Abandoned Her Again.** P1, P3, P4, and P5's fathers were found and then their moms filed for back child support. Their fathers would quit their jobs and move to an address unknown to their mothers or the child support people. Keeping their money seemingly meant more to them than taking care of their daughters/children. Their daughters internalized to mean he does not care if they are impoverished.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The researcher is a Licensed Professional Counselor and every effort was made to ensure objectivity. Credibility was ensured by recording interviews, transcribing the interviews, and checking for accuracy of the lived reality of participants. One limitation is due to the small number of participants possible in a qualitative study such that the data may be viewed as less empirical thereby limiting the generalizing of findings (Creswell, 2018). Participants volunteered of their own free will and expressed their excitement to get to tell their story in hopes of helping others. Participants provided rich, thick, detailed descriptions of their lived experiences. Follow up questions were asked in order to ensure understanding. Through the process of verification, the interview data trustworthiness was ensured. Member checking was utilized as needed and participants called or emailed any additional comments (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The subsequent calls were recorded and transcribed as well. Trustworthiness will include transferability. To meet these criteria, the findings of a study will be applicable to other situations. The interview data would be valid for other studies of women abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 and where they are today in terms of their intimate romantic relationships. The design of the study along with the meticulous execution of the study confirm trustworthiness.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Of all the participants, one participant (P4) spoke of having a good stepdad. She stated, “I didn't have the dad that whenever I started dating to put the fear of God in a boy to you know take care of his girl. I didn't have that any kind of bond like that until my stepdad was a part of my life and then he's the one that showed me a lot of different things - how I should expect to be treated - the compassion part of it.” Studying the impact of stepdads on a stepdaughter's life could bring knowledge and help stepdads take a greater role in ameliorating her feelings of abandonment.

### **Implications**

Implications for this study lie in getting information out to mental healthcare providers, school districts, churches, in order to provide resources for abandoned daughters in order to help them form healthy intimate romantic relationships and addressing issues that correlate to this abandonment in order to bring understanding, therapeutic treatment options, and facilitate positive social change to help treatment of abandoned daughters and fathers considering not being in their daughter's lives as well as behavioral health care providers treating abandoned daughters and the fathers.

Also, understanding the age of abandonment and the ‘Basic Virtue’ of each stage of Erikson's Psychosocial Stages correlating to age of abandonment may help practitioners explore the daughters understanding of hope, will, purpose, competency, and fidelity. Without success in the basic virtue of hope stage, the daughter may become mistrustful. Without success in the basic virtue of will, the daughter may feel inadequate and lack self-esteem and doubt their ability. Without success in the basic virtue of purpose, the daughter may feel guilt and be inhibited creative wise. Without success in

the basic virtue of competency, the daughter may feel inadequate and inferior. Without success in the basic virtue of fidelity, the daughter may experience role confusion and not know where she fits in the world.

### **Conclusion**

As an LPC, I see many young girls, teens, and women whose fathers were not in their lives and I see the fallout of the neglect of these fathers. Having access to articles and knowledge addressing the issue can help with understanding and treatment. Helping women who were abandoned by their fathers know they are not alone and that the abandonment is not their fault is important. Her father abandoning her says nothing about her and everything about him as a father. This study hopes to shed light and get the conversation going and give practitioners knowledge and resources to ameliorate the wounds and help fill the emptiness left behind by these absent fathers.

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## Appendix A: Screening Questionnaire

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Were you abandoned by your father prior to the age of 18? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you currently in an intimate romantic relationship? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you currently being treated for any mental health issues? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please describe:

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What is your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you raised in the United States? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, where? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you raised by your biological mother? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, who raised you? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your level of income? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your level of education? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children? ☐ Yes ☐ No      If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you raised in foster care? ☐ Yes ☐ No

## Appendix B: Open-ended Interview Questions

Note: These questions do not encompass how the interview will evolve. They simply provide the researcher with relevant guidelines to build upon.

### Research Question:

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore where women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 are today as adults in their intimate romantic relationships.

Where are women who were abandoned by their fathers prior to the age of 18 today as adults over 18 in their intimate romantic relationships?

### Open-ended interview questions:

- How old were you when your father left?
- Describe how this affected your life?
- Are you in a current relationship?
- Describe your current relationship.
- What are your expectations of an intimate partner?
- Do you feel successful in your intimate romantic relationships? To what do you attribute your success?
- Do you feel unsuccessful in your intimate romantic relationships? To what do you attribute your lack of success?
- What are your expectations of yourself as in your intimate romantic relationship?
- Describe the attributes that a father brings to the father/daughter relationship?
- List ways that you coped well or did not cope well with an absent father.

- Why do you believe you are where you are in your current intimate romantic relationship?